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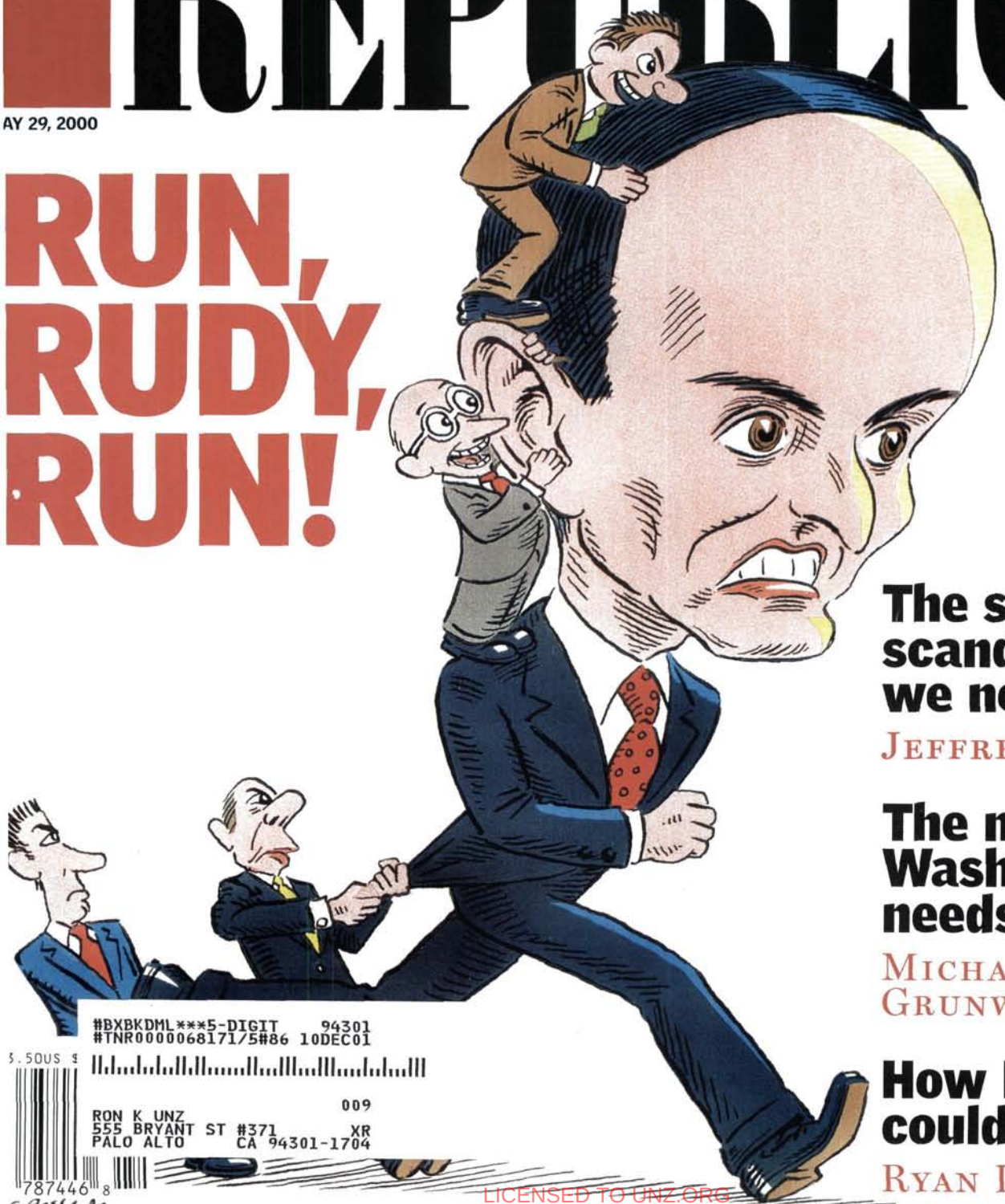

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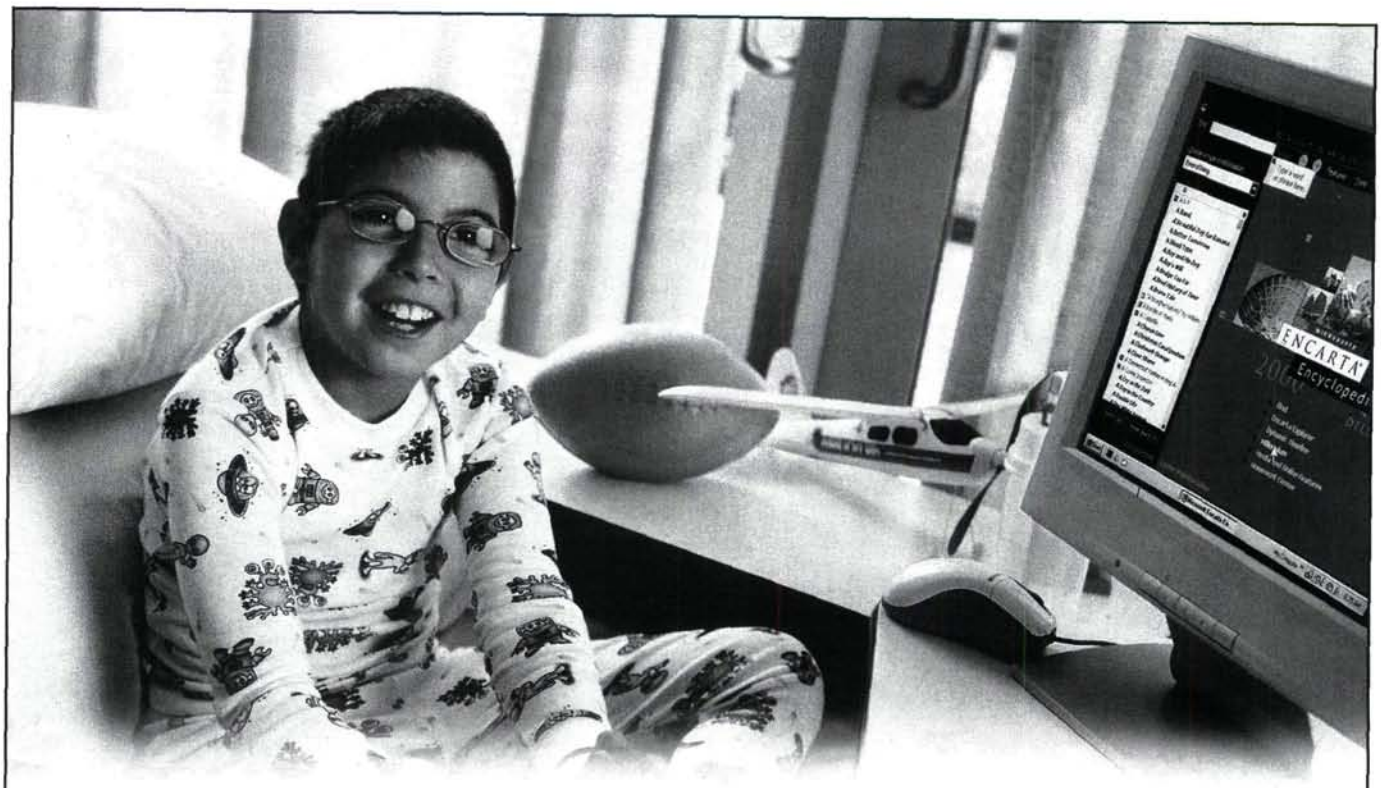

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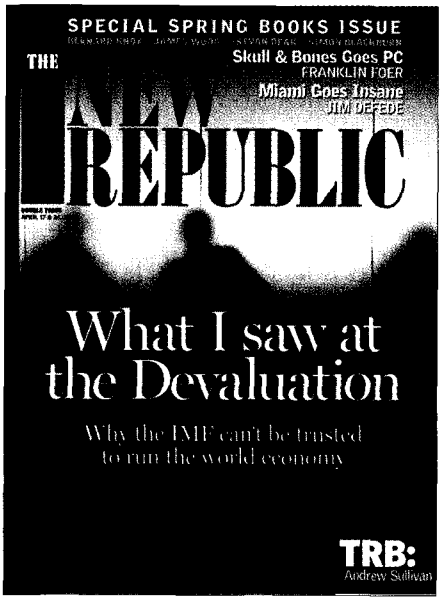
Devalued

TO THE EDITORS:

By publishing Joseph Stiglitz's account of International Monetary Fund apparatchiks pouring fuel on the fire of the 1997–1998 global financial crisis ("The Insider," April 17 & 24), THE NEW REPUBLIC is helping to ignite an overdue and badly needed civil war within the economics profession. On one side are the theologians of the University of Chicago economics orthodoxy, who think of people exclusively as culturally indistinct, utility-maximizing rational actors; on the other side are economists, like Stiglitz, who understand that mathematical modeling works only if it is informed by context and culture. While Stiglitz writes of an IMF that promotes intellectual arrogance despite country-specific ignorance, the larger crime, he argues, is that the institution vigorously resists oversight, transparency, and accountability—all of which it requires of client governments.

It's clear that Stiglitz hasn't been dulled down by government service; he gallantly refuses to pull his punches to satisfy some notion of Washington respectability. Stiglitz isn't a protectionist; he's an



empiricist, and he realizes that governments have a responsibility to install speed bumps when the high velocity of global financial flows generates too many casualties. When John Maynard Keynes was asked why he changed his view on an aspect of global economic behavior, he responded to the questioner: "When I get new information, I change my position. What, sir, do you do with new information?" It seems that Stiglitz is one of the few senior economists to adjust his economic prescriptions based on feedback and results. Officials at the Treasury Department, the IMF, and the World Bank should reread their Keynes and make an effort to hear Stiglitz, who is loudly pounding on their doors.

STEVEN C. CLEMONS
Senior Vice President
New America Foundation
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITORS:

Asia is showing miracle growth rates once again. The gross domestic product of Korea, one of the countries hardest hit in the 1997–1998 crisis, is already twelve percent higher than its pre-crisis level. What is the lesson? IMF policies work, and the notion of IMF malpractice and crackpot medicine argued by Joseph Stiglitz in TNR is out-and-out frivolous and, of course, mostly self-serving.

Most offensive and untrue is surely the suggestion that the IMF staff consists of "third-rank students from first-rate universities." (Does the same go for Stiglitz's former colleagues at the World Bank?) At Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and everywhere else, fresh economics Ph.D.s who can't get jobs at the top five universities in the world choose to work at the World Bank or the IMF. And that is for the best. Anyone likely to be picked as a top draft choice by the most prestigious schools may be a trifle too theoretical for the cruder work of policy-making. Stiglitz himself, with his predilection for the intriguing exceptions rather than the general rule, is a great case in point. Neither the IMF nor the World Bank needs theorists; they need well-trained country veterinarians. As Princeton University's great Edwin Kemmerer—the Jeff Sachs of the 1920s—said, on the periphery, the pickax is the rule.

Stiglitz's contention that ignorant and arrogant IMF staff used drastically wrong medicine (tight budgets and high interest rates), turning a difficult situation into an all-out disaster, is as incorrect as it is contrarian. In the face of the government taking a hit of as much as 50 percent of GDP (or more) in public finance from bank failure and pervasive bankruptcy, fiscal largesse should be the rule? And, in the face of a collapse of currencies under the pressure of capital flight, interest rates should be cut to make it cheaper to take money out and crash the exchange rate? Strange, indeed. For the past 100 years,

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the rule has been, without fail, that stabilization starts with the exchange rate and public finance. Investors will take confidence and bring back money when they see fiscal conservatism and high interest rates. After a few months of that, you're on the right track. That was the League of Nations' policy in the '20s, with great success. That has been IMF policy forever. And it still works: Korea is booming, and so is all of Asia. Interest rates fell within months as capital reflows stabilized and pushed currencies up; public finance started to ease once investors figured out that all this was not the end of the world. In the countries that followed the IMF's guidance promptly and without fail, recovery was faster. But in places like Indonesia, where policymakers wavered, the crisis has still not been overcome.

When countries arrive at the IMF on a stretcher, it's not the time for cute ideas. Drastic policies are necessary to avoid hemorrhage, currency collapse, and irreparable meltdown. Stabilization is neither a popularity contest nor a research seminar. Today, no finance minister will opt for the Stiglitz Clinic of Alternative Medicine; he will have an ambulance rush him to the IMF. And, when he does, markets start taking confidence very soon, and from there it is a short step to normalization.

Stiglitz complains that nobody listened to him. In fact, Malaysia's prime minister, the quack Mahathir Mohamad, did. No surprise! True, Stiglitz is a distinguished economist, on the short list for the Nobel Prize for his theoretical contributions on how markets fail. But nobody ever thought of him as a policy economist and even less as someone who has the remotest clue about macroeconomics and stabilization. After all, this is the World Bank chief economist who in July 1999 publicly urged China to devalue, with the likely consequence of a massive additional round of collapse throughout Asia. And it's a good thing nobody listened; Asia is doing well. The chief lesson for those at the IMF is that next time they should apply exactly the same remedies and enjoy an equally spectacular success. Congratulations to that bright staff at the IMF.

RUDI DORNBUSCH
Ford Professor of Economics and International Management
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITORS:

It is a pity that the World Bank has not also been a target of criticism in all the furor against the IMF. Joseph Stiglitz spares the World Bank, but, then again, he has been tied to it.

The World Bank and the IMF are different insofar as the former faces a modicum of competition in its operations from regional development lenders, such as the Inter-American Development Bank, whereas the latter is the only real lender of last resort. Efforts by Japan to create an Asian IMF were quickly squelched by the U.S. Treasury. But the World Bank and the IMF are fundamentally similar. Many of the executive directors of both organizations are appointed by finance ministers from the advanced industrial countries, who control strategic policies. The lending activities of both organizations and those of regional development banks have converged. The structural adjustment loans of the World Bank in the 1980s were just as intrusive, with as many conditionalities attached, as the bailout loans of the IMF. And the conditionalities were similar in nature; whatever a country's particular problems, the cookie-cutter set of conditionalities stipulated liberalization, deregulation, and privatization.

The World Bank is governed even less democratically than the IMF, insofar as the bank's president is always an American selected by the U.S. executive branch, while the fund's director typically gets appointed only after a secret squabble among the leading industrial nations. The World Bank also has its own resources, greater than those of the IMF, for "research." This research may attain a very high level of competence and relevance, as it did under Stiglitz's direction. But World Bank research is always subject to politicization, because the bank is a political animal. Many World Bank reports remain confidential, and what is published pretends to an objectivity that is constitutionally unattainable.

Both the IMF and the World Bank are in serious need of democratization and genuine competition.

ALICE H. AMSDEN
Department of Economics
Kyoto University
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TO THE EDITORS:

In his criticism of the IMF, Joseph Stiglitz is completely right but ultimately wrong. He misses the point.

Outside observers can easily agree that there can be little economic improvement without the basic necessities of society: a reliable court system, reasonable freedom from bribery, perhaps a well-regulated securities exchange, and all the other

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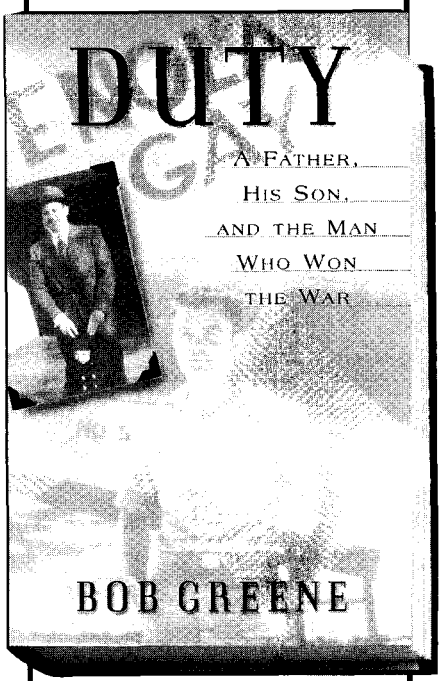
A Father, His Son, and the Man who Won the War



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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Malcolm X

I DON'T KNOW (and don't really want to know) what Vice President Al Gore does on Sunday evenings, but he could do worse than watch Fox. Apart from "The Simpsons" and the equally hilarious "Fox News at Ten," there's a relatively new show, "Malcolm in the Middle," that contains at least part of the answer to Gore's cultural doldrums. Think of it as "Malcolm in the Radical Middle."

The show features a chaotic but loving family with an unkempt lawn, a house always on the edge of bedlam, a hapless father, four irrepressibly mischievous sons, and a mother who steals every scene she's in. The plots are hardly novel, the dialogue is funny but not brilliant, and the freshness comes in part from the absence of a laugh track and the use of a single camera, movie-style. But the genius lies in the way the show reflects reality. By reality I don't mean the rose-tinted conservatism of the Family Channel and Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcast Network or the preachy liberalism of the Bloodworth-Thomasons. I mean simply that we recognize these people: the way they live, the way they speak, the way they puncture the pieties found on much of the rest of television. In this respect, "Malcolm" owes a great deal to "The Simpsons." (Don't we all?) But "The Simpsons" is made possible in part because it is a cartoon and can take liberties that real television cannot. "Malcolm" applies this principle to human beings and, amazingly, pulls it off.

In this reality, males are lovable, reckless fools. The father lusts after Porsches he can't afford. The oldest son is so delinquent that he is sent to military school in Alabama. The next-oldest, Reese, is a boy whose fists "work exactly twice as fast as his brain." Reese is followed by Malcolm (through whose eyes we witness the entire drama), who has a genius IQ but merely wants to be cool. The youngest, a doe-eyed Stuart Little of a guy, eats crispy old things he finds under the living-room couch and sometimes overdoses on diet soda.

The mother, however, is the star. Lois, played flawlessly by Jane Kaczmarek, is, in Malcolm's words, "the lord high magistrate and executioner, ultimate arbiter of justice, inflictor of guilt, and most supreme master of the remote." She takes no prisoners and regards her motherhood of four boys (five, if you include her husband) as an endless war of wit, smarts, and force. She grounds her sons regularly, calls her eldest's girlfriend a "tramp," walks around the house naked, and responds to her boys' transgressions with feats of knuckle-whitening brinkmanship. She buzzes her husband's back hair in the kitchen and tells the boys to pick up the clippings and use them for a science project. When trying to extract confessions from her sons about what happened to her new red dress, she grabs an ax and wields it over the TV set, yelling, "Say good-bye to a cherished family member!" There is no one she can't overcome, from her nasty boss to the commander of the boot camp to which she has sent her firstborn. She earns the boys' awe, respect, and love, while their father earns only their love.

If I were to propose an icon for feminism in the next century, it would, I think, be Lois. Unlike Marge Simpson, Lois works—in retail, with an overweight coworker who is always hitting on her and whom she shrugs off with ease. She manages to look great, control four boys, earn a living, trade family chores with her hapless husband, and make all their lives possible. And she does so without stretching credibility, since, for many of us, that's exactly what a middle-class mom did—and does. On the few occasions when she is truly incapacitated ("She doesn't get sick very often," Malcolm assures us, "but when a germ does get through..."), complete mayhem ensues. She is regarded in the show's universe as a force of nature, a woman of such unsentimental common sense that you'd trust her judgment on virtually anything.

Which is why I can't help wondering what Lois would make of Gore. My best guess is, not much. According to the latest polls, Gore is trailing Bush by two points among women but by 15 points among married women like Lois. These critical voters—hovering precariously between "soccer moms" and "waitress moms"—tend to think along the lines of one Jackie Pomarski, 34, who, according to *The New York Times*, is a homemaker from a working-class Southwest Chicago neighborhood. When asked by the *Times* what she thought of Gore, Pomarski ventured, Lois-like, that "he's kind of a snake in the grass. When he talks I feel like he always has a big smirk on his face." I can't imagine how Gore would respond to being dropped into Malcolm's world. But I can't help feeling that, faced with its in-your-face, pell-mell environment, he'd end up looking like a fish stranded on the living-room carpet. This is not—how can one put this delicately?—his milieu.

Gore's basic problem is not that he's wrong about most things or that he's a bad person (he is, in my view, a saint compared with his boss). It is that he seems to have no gut connection to the Loises of this world, no instinctual knowledge of their imperviousness to transparent spinning and their hostility to being addressed as if they were still in high school and English were their second language. Saying "my opponent's risky tax scheme" 30,000 times is not going to cut it with Lois. In the Republican primary, Arizona Senator John McCain connected with these people in part because of the completely unfakable nature of his expansive personality. Even George W. Bush has an ability to relate, in part because of his own insecurities among the cultural elite and in part because he's still a frat boy under the cowboy hat; and frat boys, whatever else they know, know how to get along.

But Gore's background, through no fault of his own, is elitist to the core. In this, oddly enough, he is a dead ringer for Bush senior—great at foreign policy, a superb vice president, a nasty campaigner—but without the common touch. Gore, alas, seems to have no natural gift for connecting with people he has never fully known in his own life and whom he feels alternately awed by and frightened of. That's perhaps why he's so funny and relaxed in private with elite buddies and so wooden in public with the Loises. With Lois glaring at him, he panics. He checks the polls. He tenses up. He does what others tell him Lois wants. But Lois can see through this in a split second, and she's not buying any of it.

I don't know what Gore should do about this problem, since I suspect it is unfixable. And, in an election in which issues are probably not going to be decisive, this inability to relate to no-nonsense middle-class types is a huge liability. If I were Donna Brazile or Tony Coelho, I'd urge Gore to watch a few episodes of "Malcolm" and pray that he gets it. What the sitcom proves is that the only thing that cuts through today's clutter is freshness, straightforwardness, reality: no laugh track, one camera, and the middle-class world we know. The trouble, of course, is that this middle-class world is not one Gore has ever been or truly will be a part of. And faking it only makes things worse.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

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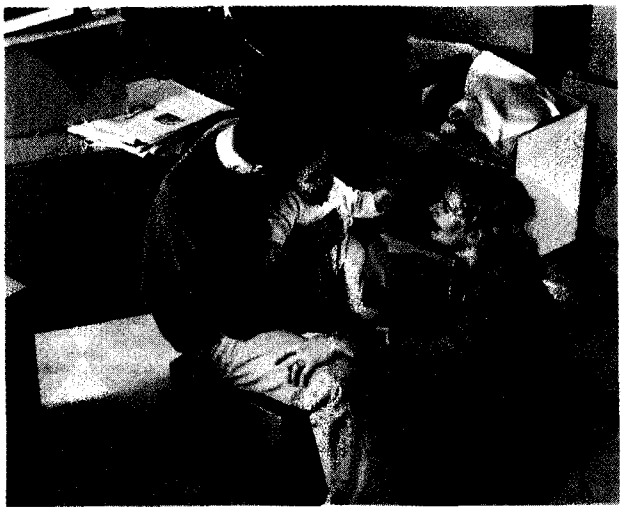

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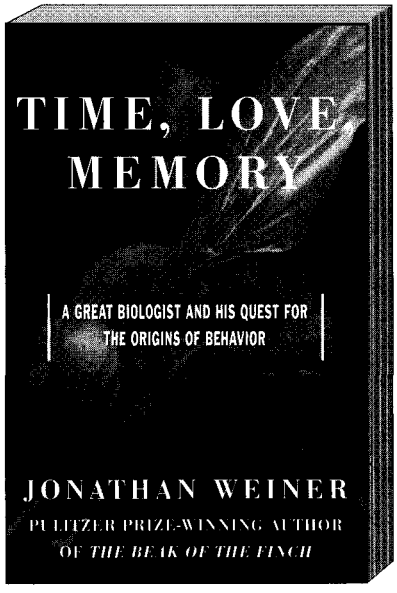
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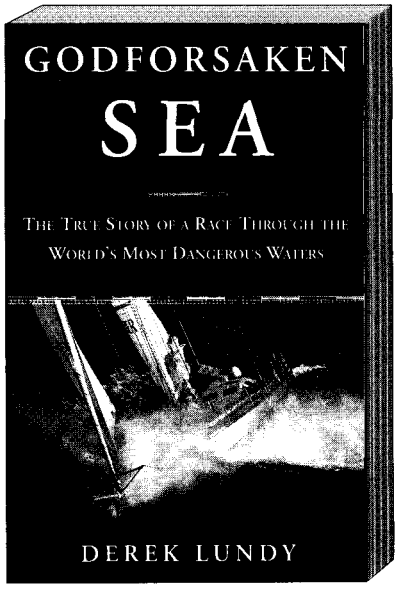

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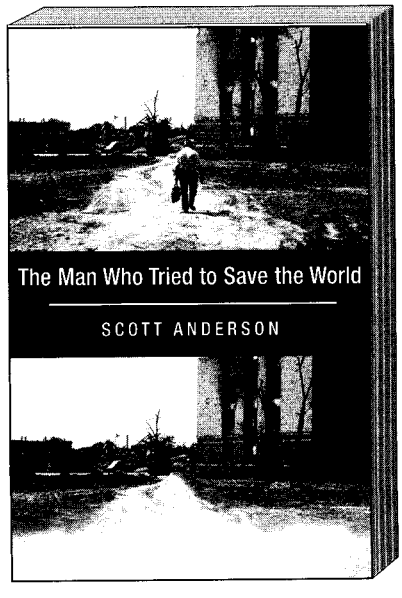

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Trade Show

NEXT WEEK, WHEN the House votes (probably yes) on permanent normal trading relations with China, Washington's decade-long slugfest over sanctions against Beijing will probably end. And it will end with a whimper. This year's debate—held in the wake of the democratic transition in Taiwan and the anti-globalization backlash in Seattle—was supposed to be momentous. Instead, it has been technical, predictable, and sterile.

Part of the reason is that the Clinton administration has preempted the discussion. China will enter the World Trade Organization regardless, the Clintonites say, so the question at hand is merely whether the United States will reap the benefits of the market liberalization that entrance requires. Of course, officials in Washington and Beijing conspired to create this fait accompli, and it is exactly the kind of maneuver that produces short-term victory and longer-term public alienation (witness the still-palpable resentment of the administration's December 1994 decision to push ratification of the GATT treaty through a lame-duck Congress).

But the debate feels hollow for a larger reason as well: Each side claims it will make China more free, and both are probably wrong. The opponents of PNTR say U.S. sanctions can push China toward democracy. Would that it were so. But America has had enough experience with sanctions to recognize the conditions under which they succeed, and China fulfills none of them. Sanctions work when powerful countries band together to isolate a rogue government. But Western Europe isn't even willing to condemn China in symbolic votes at the United Nations, let alone cut its lucrative economic ties. And sanctions work against regimes that are accountable to their people, because democratic governments, unlike authoritarian ones, cannot watch their citizens suffer and still remain in power. Sanctions also work, in a different sense, when they embolden dissidents in their internal struggle. But in China most dissidents seem to want more trade, not less.

But if the argument for sanctions is weak and naïve, the argument against them is weak and cynical. In some countries, at some times, there may indeed be a connection between greater foreign investment (which is really what PNTR means) and greater freedom. But to claim that the connection is inevitable or universal can stem only from either ideological blindness or financial self-interest. One wonders what Bill Clinton or Al Gore would have said 15 years ago if you'd told them we shouldn't impose sanctions against South Africa because American foreign investment would usher in democracy. The decade since the fall of the Berlin Wall has taught us that the relationship between markets and liberty is more complicated, not less, than we realized during the cold war, and more contingent on the vagaries of national culture, experience, and will. You don't have to travel to Singapore or Malaysia to realize that China can import Western capital without importing democracy. Moscow in the age of Putin makes the case almost as well.

This is not to say we shouldn't grant PNTR. We should; it's in our economic self-interest. But foreign investment is not foreign policy. For today, and likely tomorrow as well, China will be an insular, paranoid government filled with resentment toward the West and entitlement toward its neighbors. The primary focus of American policy, therefore, should be to strengthen the democratic, peaceful countries that prevent China from realizing its hegemonic ambitions. That means making a priority of our relations not only with Japan and South Korea but with India, the Philippines, and Indonesia, as well. It means helping them contradict Lee and Mahathir and Jiang's pernicious rhetoric about the authoritarian "Asian way." It means building diplomatic, economic, and military ties that show China there will be consequences if it tries to act out its imperial fantasies.

And, most of all, it means an ironclad, unabashed commitment to Taiwan. For too long, American liberals have viewed Taiwan as a right-wing fetish. It is not. It is one of the most inspiring stories of the later half of the twentieth century and the best evidence that what Beijing says about its own culture's capacity for freedom is a lie. What better way to show our commitment to Chinese democracy than to defend Chinese democracy? We should abandon the silly hypocrisies that keep Taiwanese leaders from visiting the United States and fight for Taipei's entry, alongside Beijing, into international organizations and, eventually, into the United Nations. And we should give Taiwan sufficient weaponry to make sure China knows unification will occur only one way, the same way it did between East and West Germany: peacefully and in freedom.

Viewed as part of this broader strategy, PNTR is worthwhile. On its own, it means little. No one should mourn the end of the China sanctions fight. Let's just hope it's followed by something better. ■

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NOTEBOOK

THE ACCIDENTAL INTERVENTIONIST: Just last week, it seemed that the Senate would pass a bill establishing a July 2001 deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. ground troops from Kosovo, and Republican isolationists were waxing their mustaches. "I think this has been an improvident adventure from the beginning," groused Republican Senator Slade Gorton of Washington state. But then in stepped an unlikely hero: George W. Bush. The Texas governor has frequently criticized the Clinton administration for its fuzziness on withdrawing from Kosovo, and yet here he was, publicly announcing his opposition to the bill. True, Bush wasn't exactly sounding a call for internationalism. A spokesman said that while the governor agreed that the White House "has failed to instill trust in Congress and the American people when it comes to our military and deployment of troops overseas," he was concerned with the "legislative overreach on the powers of the presidency" that the bill represents. But, no matter how Bush stumbled into his decision, it is a good one, and it should be applauded. What's more, it serves as a welcome rebuke to usually interventionist House Democrats, like Barney Frank, who have backed a bipartisan proposal for a similarly precipitous and shortsighted troop withdrawal. Bush's opposition, according to Republican Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska, a key supporter of the withdrawal deadline, will likely spell the bill's doom, as many GOP senators are sure to defer to their presidential nominee's judgment. We never thought we'd say it, but maybe Frank should do the same.

WHITE NOISE: Now that he's scored one foreign policy coup, maybe George W. should go for another. Maybe he should say something about Sierra Leone. In fact, maybe some Republican, *any* Republican, should say something about one of the greatest moral disasters of U.S. foreign policy in the past decade. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott and House Speaker Dennis Hastert have been mum on the topic; so has the usually loquacious Jesse Helms. And it's not just Republican elected officials, it's the conservative press as well. Since troops loyal to Sierra Leonean rebel leader Foday Sankoh took 500 U.N. peacekeepers hostage two weeks ago, *The Weekly Standard* and *National Review* have devoted not a word to Sierra Leone. Nor have conservative columnists George Will, William Safire, or Charles Krauthammer (though Krauthammer says he plans to write about the topic). To be fair, the networks haven't been much better. The Sunday-morning chat shows found time to discuss the Million Mom March, the intricacies of New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani's marriage, and even Paula Jones's interest in posing nude for *Penthouse*, but they devoted not a word to Sierra Leone. Still, it's the Republicans' silence that is most surprising—given their usual laserlike precision when it comes to homing in on President Clinton's foreign policy snafus. Maybe it's because they quietly agree with the Clinton administration's policy of betrayal and indifference. Or maybe the Republicans' own indifference to Africa runs so deep that they don't feel the need to have a view on Sierra Leone at all. Either way, it gives new meaning to the GOP's vaunted color-blindness. The party is especially blind when that color is black.

THE LIMITS OF INDIGNATION: Alex Penelas, the formerly respectable mayor of Miami-Dade County, made no secret of his feelings about the federal government during the Elián González case. He attacked the Clinton administration for trying to reunite father and son. He told Attorney General Janet Reno that if a confrontation with Elián's Miami relatives led to bloodshed, it would be her fault. And, most memorably, Penelas joined the mayor of the city of Miami—"Crazy Joe" Carollo—in vowing that local police would not assist federal agents if they tried to extract Elián. (Penelas subsequently "clarified" his remarks, making clear that Miami-Dade police would help keep the peace—they just wouldn't assist in taking the boy.) Well, now that it's time to pay for Operation Elián, Penelas wants to make friends. This week Miami-Dade, with Penelas's approval, asked the federal government for as much as $5 million to pay for the cost of police work during the week after the raid. A spokesperson for the county says Miami-Dade is merely filing for the same disaster relief for which cities like Seattle and Los Angeles filed after upheavals there. Fine. Of course, the mayors of Seattle and Los Angeles didn't act like modern-day Orville Faubuses, practically denying the authority of the federal government whose largesse they now seek to tap. Penelas, once considered a rising star in the Democratic Party for his appeal within the largely Republican Cuban-American community, nearly wore out the patience of his onetime champions Bill Clinton and Al Gore with his pre-raid publicity stunts. With this latest maneuver, one can only hope he has burned that bridge for good.

FUMING: This week, the Clinton administration proposed requiring anti-smog devices on trucks and buses—automobile manufacturers have made remarkable progress against smog emissions, but trucks and buses have been exempt—while mandating that the diesel fuel used by such vehicles be reformulated to reduce its pollutant content. News reports presented it as a stunning, daunting challenge and quoted industry predictions of huge price increases for diesel fuel. "We are deeply concerned that EPA's proposal will seriously harm consumers of diesel fuel and, ultimately, the nation's economy," gravely intoned the American Petroleum Institute. "The agency's proposal will be extremely costly and could limit essential fuel supplies." But, if history is any guide, the reform will be accomplished quickly and affordably. In fact, though few in the press ever mention it, beginning in 1989, gasoline sold in the Los Angeles area was reformulated to reduce its pollutant content. In 1995, reformulated gasoline spread to most of the nation's big cities, and it is now almost ubiquitous. Reformulated gasoline works so well that drivers aren't even aware they are buying the stuff. Rather than costing an extra 25 cents per gallon, as predicted, reformulation has increased prices at most by a penny or two, as refiners have found efficient, innovative means to

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subtract pollutants from fuel. The effectiveness of reformulated gasoline is one reason smog levels are declining in most cities. Last year Los Angeles recorded its first summer since the 1950s without a stage-one ozone alert. Because reformulated gasoline is a success, the media ignores it, but the effectiveness of low-pollution gas suggests that reformulated diesel will be a success, too. Finding the means to make affordable low-pollution truck and bus fuel will not only benefit America's environment but provide an important example to the developing world, where the soot from diesel fumes is a much worse public health problem than it is here. Oil companies groused about reformulated gasoline, but they then did a great job manufacturing it. The same will likely hold for reformulated diesel. Let's hope that this time credit is given where it's due.

EYE-OPENER: In a victory for good taste, John Travolta's sci-fi pic *Battlefield Earth* has bombed at the box office, pulling in a paltry $11.5 million its opening weekend. With any luck, it will be gone by June. But there's an even bigger loser than Warner Bros., the studio that churned out this dreck. We refer, of course, to the Church of Scientology. Intended by devout Scientologist Travolta as an homage to the church's founder, L. Ron Hubbard, who wrote the novel on which the movie is based, *Battlefield Earth* has had precisely the opposite effect. Reviews of the film have sneered at Hubbard's hack tendencies, clearly implying that his followers are idiots. "It may take a blind zealot to believe that L. Ron Hubbard is an inspired science-fiction writer," concluded a review in *Entertainment Weekly*. What's more, *Battlefield Earth* may have permanently sullied Travolta's reputation. Once Scientology's coolest member, Travolta has appeared on MTV to promote the religion. We imagine he won't be quite as strong a draw again; the *Saturday Night Fever* icon's star power has been permanently dimmed by *Battlefield Earth*'s images of his fat green face surrounded by dreadlocks. The only harsher fate Scientology could suffer would be for two of its other glamorous Hollywood adherents, Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, to star together in a pretentious movie about sexual fantasies that included a masked orgy. ■

VINT'S WEEK

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The brilliant, dishonest Million Mom March.

Women's Fib

By SARAH WILDMAN

PRESSED IN AMID a pushing crowd, Debby Murry held out a laminated photo of her daughter. Kassie, she explained, was shot and killed during a break-in at her Baton Rouge, Louisiana, apartment less than a year ago. "I thought it couldn't happen to me," Murry said, passing out miniature pictures of her daughter dressed in a ballet costume. "I'm proud of all the parents out here who didn't lose a child, because I probably wouldn't have been out here [if I hadn't]."

Kassie's death prompted her mother to join hundreds of thousands of others at the Million Mom March last Sunday. Bearing images of motherhood (the official T-shirt declared WE'RE LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD MOMS), the marchers issued what they claimed was a nonpartisan, apolitical call for "commonsense" gun control. "This is personal, not political," explained the website advertising the event. "Politicians, take heed: We are watching you! The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world!" Dawn Anna, who lost her daughter Lauren Townsend in the Columbine High shooting, shouted from the stage.

It may be the smartest thing the gun-control movement has ever done. By equating their cause not with liberalism or, indeed, with political beliefs of any kind but instead with mothers' concern for their children, gun-control advocates garnered adoring press and put the National Rifle Association squarely on the defensive. There was only one problem: That equation is not valid. Whatever you think of gun control, it bears no necessary connection to motherhood. Even if you grant that mothers care more about child safety than the rest of the population does, concern for child safety does not necessarily equal support for limiting the sale of guns. To assume it does is to pretend the entire gun-control debate does not exist. On many issues, over many years, the American left has portrayed questions of ideology as questions of identity. But never more so than last week on the National Mall.

The political use of motherhood, of course, is nothing new. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo protested the kidnapping and murder of 30,000 of their fellow citizens at the hands of Argentina's military dictatorship, thereby putting the issue of "the disappeared" on the international human rights agenda. In Israel, a group called Four Mothers lobbied the Israeli government to withdraw from Lebanon—successfully moving their cause from the fringe left to the political mainstream.

But it was the enormously successful Mothers Against Drunk Driving on which the Million Mom March planners modeled their effort. MADD began when a young girl was killed by a drunk driver who, it turned out, had been arrested several times before. Her death spurred several women to action, and, thanks in part to a grassroots network with 600 chapters nationwide, MADD helped raise the national drinking age to 21, lowered the legal blood-alcohol limit in many states, and successfully lobbied for sobriety checkpoints and vigilance against underage drinking. The secret to MADD's political success is its apolitical image, an image built on its invocation of all-American motherhood. In its materials, MADD bills itself as "real people, moms, dads, young people, and other individuals" who are "just trying to make a difference."

The Million Mom March followed a similar formula. "We all have a job of mothering," actress Susan Sarandon told the marchers. "We must protect all our children from the violence that threatens them. That means the abandonment and inequality that for the longest time has made poor neighborhoods, primarily neighborhoods of color, war zones where children regularly dodge gunfire." After the march, Maryland Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend developed the point further: "It's saying [gun control] is common sense. This is not radical, and this should appeal to the mainstream."

But gun control is a political cause in a way the crusade against drunk driving never was. Although the alcohol industry fought the increase in the drinking age, its opposition was based not on ideology but on pure economic self-interest. The gun industry, of course, opposes gun control for the same reason, but its opposition represents only a small portion of the anti-gun-control effort. There was no "pro-drunk-driving" movement, with chapters throughout the nation and a well-developed political philosophy. And there weren't really any mothers ideologically committed to freer access to alcohol or less police enforcement of traffic laws.

There are, however, plenty of mothers (and plenty of other Americans) who oppose gun violence and yet don't support gun control. Whether you agree with them or not, the millions of Americans in the NRA believe that gun control limits their freedom, and they have a historical and constitutional argument, built around the Second Amendment, that explains why. So when gun-control foes saw their opponents cloaking their movement in the mantle of motherhood, they did exactly the same thing, hastily organizing a counterdemonstration of "Second Amendment Sisters." "Please join us in our ARMED INFORMED MOTHERS' MARCH—AIMM," they pleaded. "All women are invited to attend, because this affects all of us, and our right to protect our families." The counterdemonstration, which drew about 1,000 people, was nowhere near as politically successful as the Million Mom March. But, intellectually, it was just as incoherent.

Of course, it might be said that a little incoherence is a small price to pay for progress on an important issue that has been stalled for years by NRA bullying. And, in the short term, the Million Mom March may indeed help bring about legislative results. But, in the long run, culture wars, whether over abortion, affirmative action, or gun control, cannot be won with clever tactical maneuvers. They must be settled. And settlements are impossible until combatants look honestly at the motivations of the other side. And, perhaps even more importantly, at their own. ■

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Where We Stand

A commentary on public education and other critical issues

A Blank Check

By SANDRA FELDMAN, President
American Federation of Teachers

People in Hartford, Connecticut, have good reason to be proud and pleased. For a number of years, students in this poor, urban school district ranked academically lowest in the state, but now things are changing. A new superintendent, working with the AFT local, used Title I money (federal funding targeted specifically to educationally needy children) to put in place a proven program called Success for All. And this year, the district celebrated significant improvements in math and reading test scores.

This is just one story among many in which children are doing better because their schools receive federal funding. But if a measure that Congress is currently debating becomes law, there will be fewer of these success stories.

The so-called Straight As bill would allow states to lump together federal funding now devoted to programs that are proven to help children learn—as well as programs that help keep schools safe and drug free and enhance learning technology—and give the money to the states to use in any way they choose.

The legislative term for this is "block grant." But it should really be called "blank check." The result would probably be the disappearance—or at least the radical weakening—of programs designed to guarantee funding for critical national objectives like safe schools and lower class sizes.

Guaranteed Funding

The biggest of these programs, Title I, reaches 11 million disadvantaged kids—though in fact many more could use the kind of help it offers. Title I money goes directly to the districts and schools where it's most needed, and it pays for, among other things, extra teachers and programs that help students master reading and writing and achieve higher standards. Over the years, as Title I has been improved and focused on proven programs, student achievement has improved, and in some cases, such as Hartford, Title I has been a big factor in turning around entire schools and even school districts.

It is possible that the states would carry on Title I and other programs that are working—but it's very risky. The reality about block grants is that they allow state governments to spend the money any way they want to. And of course, they have their own priorities, their own pressures and demands to answer to, which do not necessarily include needy children.

Why should Congress threaten education programs that work?

This is not to say the states aren't good at lots of things. Most have been working successfully to raise student achievement. But it has been the targeted program funds of the federal government that have spurred most of them on. States have never done a good job of making sure all children get their fair share of the education pie. Schools in poorer communities have always been under funded. Poor children, who need more than other children, have always gotten much less.

Specious Arguments

Supporters of education block grants talk about giving states the right to run their own school systems without federal interference. They claim they are for "flexibility" and against the "status quo." This is disingenuous, to say the least. Virtually all of the Title I money already goes to the local level, so what kind of flexibility are they talking about? (Flexibility not to spend the money on what works?) As for moving away from the status quo, that already happened in a big way in Title I just four years ago. Strong accountability requirements for districts and schools receiving Title I funds were added, and those requirements have been the engine driving a lot of the academic progress we've been seeing in the states.

Of course, there is a big remaining problem with the status quo: There simply isn't enough federal education funding to meet needs. One percent of the entire federal budget is spent on K-12 education, in comparison, for example, with the 2.5 percent spent on transportation. No one denies that transportation is critical, but is building highways more than twice as important as educating our kids?

Americans want money spent according to need, not politics. So why would Congress even consider turning the funding for programs that serve needy kids into pork barrels for the states? Straight As is bad news for children, and people who care about educational equity should call their members of Congress to tell them so. ▮

***Where We Stand* is published once every month in *The New Republic*. To comment, write to Sandra Feldman, AFT, 555 New Jersey Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20001.** **© Sandra Feldman 2000.** **Visit our web site (http://www.aft.org).**

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New York Dispatch

Hammer Away

By Todd Pruzan

On a clear day, you can see the Masters of the Universe from Anthony Morris's office window, four flights above Brooklyn's industrial Greenpoint Avenue. But the panorama of midtown Manhattan can't compete with the frenzy inside Morris Workshops, a high-end furniture manufacturer always buzzing with orders for pricey bookcases, boardroom tables, and credenzas from corporate clients in the midst of an economic boom.

Unfortunately for Morris, he has to fill those orders with a skeleton crew of 30 woodworkers. "If someone showed up tomorrow and said he was a cabinetmaker, I would hire him on the spot," says the weary Morris, who pays his workers handsomely—about $18 per hour, and $27 per hour for overtime, which is virtually mandatory for meeting deadlines. He adds, "I don't necessarily need to hire an American." Indeed, only six of Morris's 30 staffers are American-born; the others hail from Italy, Guyana, Jamaica, Poland, Morocco, and the former Soviet bloc. What these foreign workers have in common is that they come from countries where training for skilled labor remains part of the educational curriculum.

But in America it increasingly does not—particularly in New York City, where over the past three decades the Board of Education has systematically eliminated vocational study, or the class formerly known as shop, from its standard public high school curriculum. Of course, New York's billion-dollar furniture-manufacturing industry is a shadow of its former self: in 1958, the city boasted 18,200 furniture and fixtures jobs, compared with 3,700 today. But New York's manufacturing sector as a whole still offers 262,800 high-paying jobs. "Manufacturing is a viable industry here, with salaries that are quite good," says Rae Rosen, an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. "It's great for immigrants, but it would also be good for kids finishing high school who maybe can't find a job." So why aren't schools training kids for them?

New York school officials argue that students need some sort of college education to succeed in today's marketplace. "A twelve-year education culminating in a diploma is seldom sufficient for students ... to earn a wage that will support a family," says Steve Feldman, who directs the Board of Education's School to Career Program, which provides workplace internships for high school students. That's why, in 1974, the board abandoned its three-pronged educational system—college-preparatory, commercial, and general diplomas—in favor of an academic standard for all students, regardless of their aptitude for higher education. Then, in 1984, the board replaced vocational education with "technology education," phasing out industrial courses like woodworking and placing more emphasis on subjects like robotics and word processing.

The impact of these policies is readily apparent at a place like William E. Grady Technical-Vocational High School in Brooklyn. With a student body that is 85 percent black, Grady would seem perfectly suited to combat New York's 12.3 percent black unemployment rate (27 percent among blacks between the ages of 16 and 19). But, since the 1998–1999 academic year, Grady's 4,000 student applications have fallen by half; next year, applications are expected to slide to 1,000. Five years ago, 90 students attended Grady's carpentry/woodworking program. Today enrollment is down to 30 and falling.

And no wonder: As Roy Zirillo, Grady's assistant principal in charge of career placement, discovered this school year, boilerplate promotional material informing students about mechanical, structural, and electrical/technical career programs has vanished from the annual *Directory of the Public High Schools*, the citywide course catalog. "So, if you know you want to be a plumber," Zirillo says, "you won't know about a school that teaches plumbing unless you're the kind of kid who looks through a directory to find one. You mostly learn about it by word of mouth."

About the only word of mouth, though, is coming from manufacturers like Morris, who are begging Zirillo to send them workers. "There's a desperate need for craftsmen," says Zirillo. "You need plumbers, you need carpenters, you need electricians. That need has not been replaced by microprocessing." As for Grady's effort to train students in the latter, replacing the vocational programs of yore with technical-education classes, Zirillo scoffs: "When they say 'computer programming,' they mean word processing. How long does it take you to learn word processing? It's crap. What's more highly skilled than using a computer is learning how to diagnose a problem with a car or a refrigerator."

"Yes, there are average correlations between salary and college education," says Jon Zeltsman, a former owner of a furniture-manufacturing firm and now a manufacturing consultant. "But, once you get specific to people and businesses, you can rapidly deviate from these average trends. That's what educators typically don't understand when they design programs and channel kids away from their inclinations and desires."

At Grady, Zirillo realizes he can no longer expect the Board of Education to promote the very programs his school was designed to teach, so he's undertaking a poignant grassroots response: writing and distributing a homemade pamphlet to promote Grady's classes—refrigeration, auto repair, woodworking—to Brooklyn students. Zirillo estimates printing costs at $2,000 to $3,000, to be funded, literally, by spare change from the school's vending machines.

But Zirillo knows his Coke-machine-financed pamphlet can't boost his school's programs the way an entry in the *Directory of the Public High Schools* once did. The students at Grady, and the thousands of young New Yorkers more inclined to work with their hands than with computer

Todd Pruzan is an editor at Inside.com and *McSweeney's*. He lives in Brooklyn.

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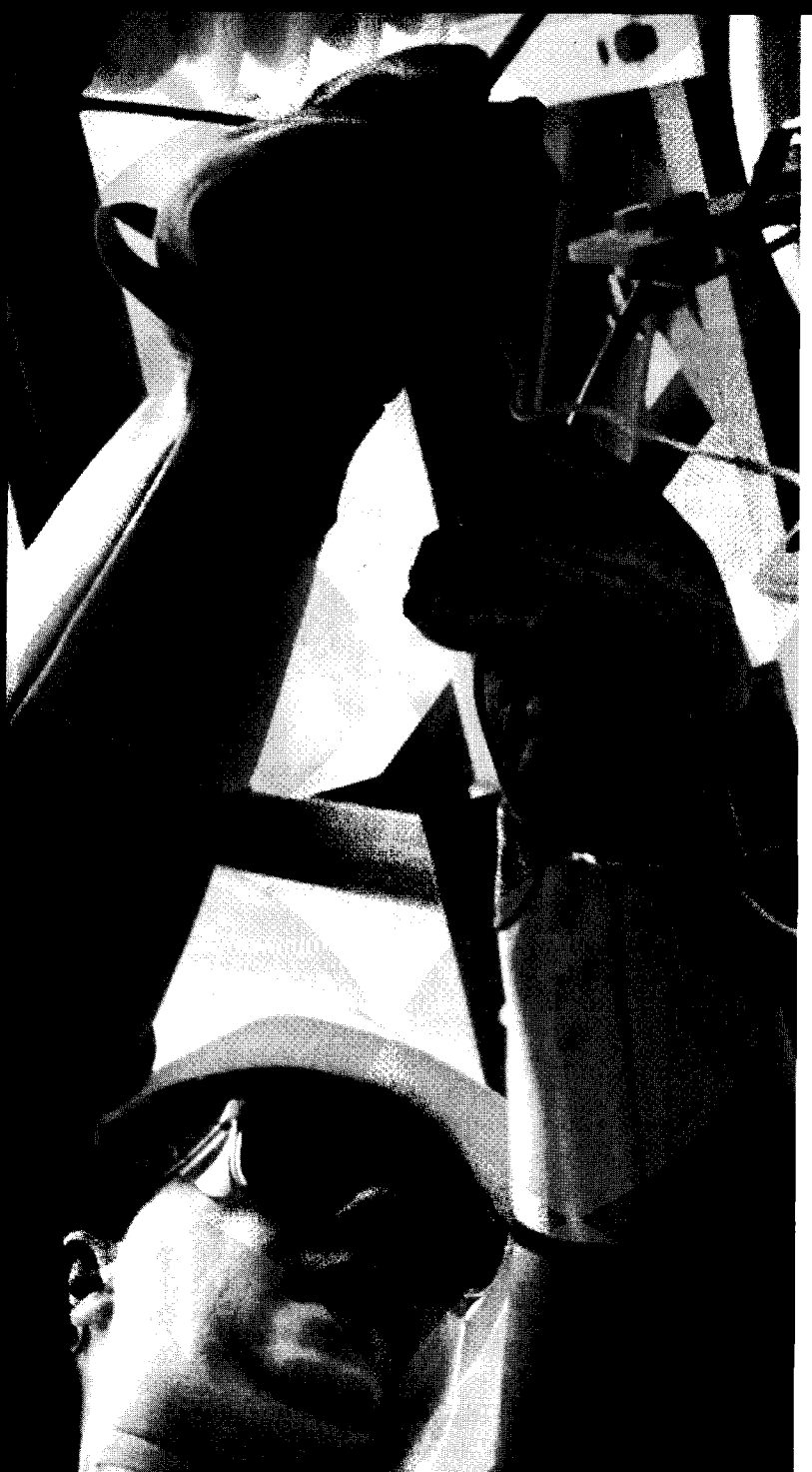
What do I think about electric reliability?

"Today there are thousands of wholesale electric generators using transmission lines. With all these companies competing, the movements of power across these lines have increased dramatically. Retail electric competition will add even more demands. We need to expand the system to meet the market's needs."



Electricity makes our lives better and our economy stronger, and this means we need to take sensible steps to keep our electric system reliable. To keep the system running right, Congress and policy makers should take steps that will bring long-term improvements to our electric system. Let's:

- Recognize that we need new transmission lines to get power to people. Everyone needs to work together to resolve critical transmission planning and siting issues, develop new technologies, and enhance utility and electrical worker training and skills.
- Promote policies that will stimulate investments in transmission facilities.
- Follow a voluntary and flexible approach to form regional transmission organizations that increase the efficient use of the system.
- Change the North American Electric Reliability Council into a self-regulating reliability organization, under FERC, that can enforce reliability rules on all transmission operators and users.

We are already working on improvements to help meet the growing demand for electricity. Let's make sure we have the right mix of market solutions and government oversight to make the electric system better.

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keyboards, need a school system that teaches the kinds of skills that Morris Workshops and other manufacturers are desperate to have. "The people in charge now are liberal arts guys," Zirillo says. "Steve Feldman is a liberal arts guy. They've got to get a shop person into the vocational area. I mean, I wouldn't want to be the one in charge of English and social studies." For now, both scenarios seem equally unlikely. ■

Is China today's Poland?

Freedom 101

By ADAM MICHNIK

IN DECEMBER 1981, after the Polish government imposed martial law in response to the Solidarity uprising, Ronald Reagan announced he would levy economic sanctions on Poland. As a member of Solidarity, I applauded Reagan's decision. After all, our movement, built by millions of people seeking national and civic freedom, had, through a wholly arbitrary act by Poland's ruling generals, been declared a criminal organization. Its members were either carted off to jail or forced into hiding. America's decision to penalize the Polish government for terrorizing its own citizens seemed eminently reasonable.

My opinion, however, was hardly universal. The sanctions provided the generals with a convenient scapegoat on which to blame Poland's deep economic problems. And even the nation's Catholic bishops, a source of great moral authority, opposed the sanctions, arguing that they harmed not just the regime but all of Polish society.

Nevertheless, I believed then, and I believe today, that America's decision was sensible and effective. For one thing, it offered those of us in the democratic opposition a dramatic sign that we were not alone—indeed, that the world's most powerful nation was our ally. The sanctions also sent a pointed message to the ruling generals: Unless they took substantial steps toward political liberalization, they would not enjoy normal dealings with the civilized world.

In December 1986, the Reagan administration announced it would repeal the sanctions. Once again I applauded—not because I had changed my view of sanctions per se but because of the process by which the administration lifted them. First, representatives of the State Department came to Warsaw, where, in the residence of U.S. ambassador John Davies, they met with representatives of Solidarity—still officially illegal—including our leader, Lech Walesa. The Americans asked us how we felt about a repeal of sanctions. We replied that such a repeal should be accompanied by a clear declaration of American support for Solidarity and for the process of democratic change. We also said the United States should make clear that the lifting of sanctions was approved by the democratic opposition. And this was exactly how it was done. Within three years the regime in Warsaw had crumbled.

The story of American sanctions against Poland illustrates a banal but important truth, one worth remembering during the current debate over U.S. policy toward China: There is no universal method for forcing authoritarian regimes to democratize. In the fight for freedom, two things must go hand in hand—uncompromising condemnation of dictatorial regimes and great flexibility in choosing the methods of opposing them.

SO WHEN CAN sanctions work effectively? Against a regime like Stalin's Soviet Union or Hoxha's Albania they simply cannot. Both Stalin and Hoxha consciously chose to isolate their nations from the rest of the world. Sanctions would have been redundant. Beyond making their moral opposition to these regimes known, there was little Western democracies could do.

Brezhnev's Soviet Union, on the other hand, like Jaruzelski's Poland, depended on Western capital and Western credit for economic survival. As a result, both regimes were susceptible to economic pressure. In particular, because Poland enjoyed most-favored-nation trading status with the United States, the revocation of this status produced significant economic pain. To be able to revoke it, however, America first had to grant it. In other words, in order to exert economic pressure on a dictatorship, it is first necessary to enter into an economic relationship with it.

But this, in turn, creates moral and political dilemmas. Is it legitimate to maintain extensive economic contact with a country where basic human rights are crushed on a daily basis? Will companies employ complicated geopolitical reasoning to justify ruthless and cynical business practices? There is not, and perhaps there cannot be, a simple answer to these questions.

As a result it is not easy to say what policy the democratic world should adopt with regard to China. China is no ordinary country. For one thing, it is the size of a continent. And the more China links itself to the global market, the more its society will emerge from isolation. At the same time, Beijing continues brutally to repress the nation's meager democratic opposition.

True, from time to time the Chinese government makes a small concession to Western public opinion by freeing a few opposition members from jail and allowing them to travel outside the country. And it helps that Western public opinion carefully follows the fates of these dissidents and that international organizations, and even governments, speak out in their defense.

This pressure, however, is only effective to the extent that Beijing believes it is in China's national interest to have Western investors. And the recent trend in that direction was by no means historically inevitable. The impulse to open to the world often goes hand in hand with the impulse to close off from it. Over the last century, for instance, the Communist

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countries of Europe demonstrated two evolutionary trends: toward a market economy and increased political openness, and toward chauvinistic aggression and authoritarianism.

Communist China may be similar. And to support its move toward market and political liberalization it is necessary to be present on the Chinese stage. This certainly does not mean cynically tolerating dictatorial government there. It does mean, however, radically broadening the avenues for influencing China's evolution. Imposing sanctions against China today may end up having the same effect as the current embargo on Cuba—namely, strengthening rather than weakening its jingoistic and anti-market tendencies.

There are, therefore, two dangers against which democratic leaders must guard as they formulate their approach to Beijing. The first is a policy of extreme realpolitik, in which concerns about Chinese repression are shunted aside in favor of efforts to strengthen economic ties. Such a policy might extend the life of the Chinese dictatorship, just as years ago it extended the rule of military dictatorships in Latin America. On the other hand, a politics centered entirely on human rights presents an equal danger—for such a policy can easily dissolve into empty rhetoric, from which little more than moral indignation results. In short, while moral indignation against dictatorships should be an irremovable component of the international politics practiced by democratic nations, it can't replace international politics. Politics is, after all, about what is actually possible.

COMPLICATING THE DEBATE over China is the unresolved debate about what finally caused Soviet communism to fall. American realists say it was détente, which calmed communism's aggressive tendencies and finally forced Moscow into discussions on human rights. American liberals say it was President Carter and Zbigniew Brzezinski's emphasis on human rights. Republican hawks say it was the unyielding stance taken by Reagan, whose costly "Star Wars" plan terrified the "evil empire" into capitulating. In the Vatican they say John Paul II overthrew communism; in Moscow they say Gorbachev did; in Afghanistan nobody doubts it was the mujahideen who dug communism's grave. Meanwhile we Poles are certain that Solidarity drove the nails into communism's coffin.

Each of us is probably somewhat right. If we are to discover a more expansive formula, however, it is necessary to remember that the fundamental tools of communism are deceit and violence. Effective anti-communism, therefore, requires that we unmask and dismantle first one and then the other. And this means there can be no return to the double standards of the past, when anti-communism was all that was required to gain a regime entrance into the family of democratic nations. For it is never possible to honestly oppose Communist lies and violence while simultaneously tolerating anti-Communist lies and violence. A capitalist Chinese dictatorship is the moral equivalent of a Communist Chinese dictatorship. Repression, whether right-wing or left-wing, is never justified. And it is against all such repression that the community of democratic nations must struggle. Yesterday in Warsaw, today in Beijing. ■

A better candidate than Rudy?

Run of the Mill

By RYAN LIZZA

HAS ANYONE EVER benefited from adultery as much as Hillary Clinton? Her husband is caught with another woman and her public-approval ratings, long languishing in the 40s, shoot up to the 60s, making her a viable Senate candidate. Then congressional enemies like Newt Gingrich and Bob Livingston, who rose to power out of the ashes of her health care plan, are exposed as cheating cads and disgraced. And now an adulterous liaison has all but vanquished her presumptive Republican opponent in the New York Senate race.

New conventional wisdom: She's a shoo-in. New York Governor George Pataki, the only potential Giuliani replacement who leads Hillary in the polls, says he's not going to run. Wealthy vanity candidate Ted Forstmann ruled himself out after briefly flirting with the idea. Peter King wants the job, but commentators consider the Geraldo-friendly congressman a lightweight, and GOP officials resent his vote against impeachment and his endorsement of Arizona Senator John McCain. If Giuliani drops out, expect the party to rally around Rick Lazio, a four-term congressman from Long Island. And expect the pundits to say he doesn't have a chance. But they'll be wrong. In fact, if the Republicans had to build a Hillary beater from scratch, they'd come up with someone a lot like Enrico Anthony Lazio.

After all, it wouldn't be the first time a no-name New York Republican had challenged a marquee Democrat, endured press ridicule, and had the last laugh. In 1993, the New York GOP set out to discover, through polling and focus groups, what kind of candidate could defeat then-Governor Mario Cuomo. They found that the ideal person would be a fiscally conservative, pro-choice, ethnic Catholic with legislative experience. George Pataki was plucked from state Senate obscurity and went on to beat Cuomo by four points.

Pataki and Lazio have a lot in common. Both practiced law before entering politics. Both are telegenic, moderate Republicans from the suburbs. Both are pro-death-penalty, pro-choice Catholics with ethnic backgrounds (Lazio is Italian; Pataki, Hungarian and Italian). As legislators they both earned reputations for shrewdly bucking their party leadership when GOP orthodoxy grew unpopular. And both are ruthlessly ambitious.

Lazio's strategy, like Pataki's, requires making the campaign a referendum on his Democratic opponent. When Pataki first announced his candidacy in 1993, he trailed Cuomo 24 to 48. The latest Zogby poll shows Lazio behind Hillary Clinton 35 to 48. But Clinton, like Cuomo, suffers from high unfavorable ratings accumulated over a long and controversial career. In fact, in hypothetical Zogby

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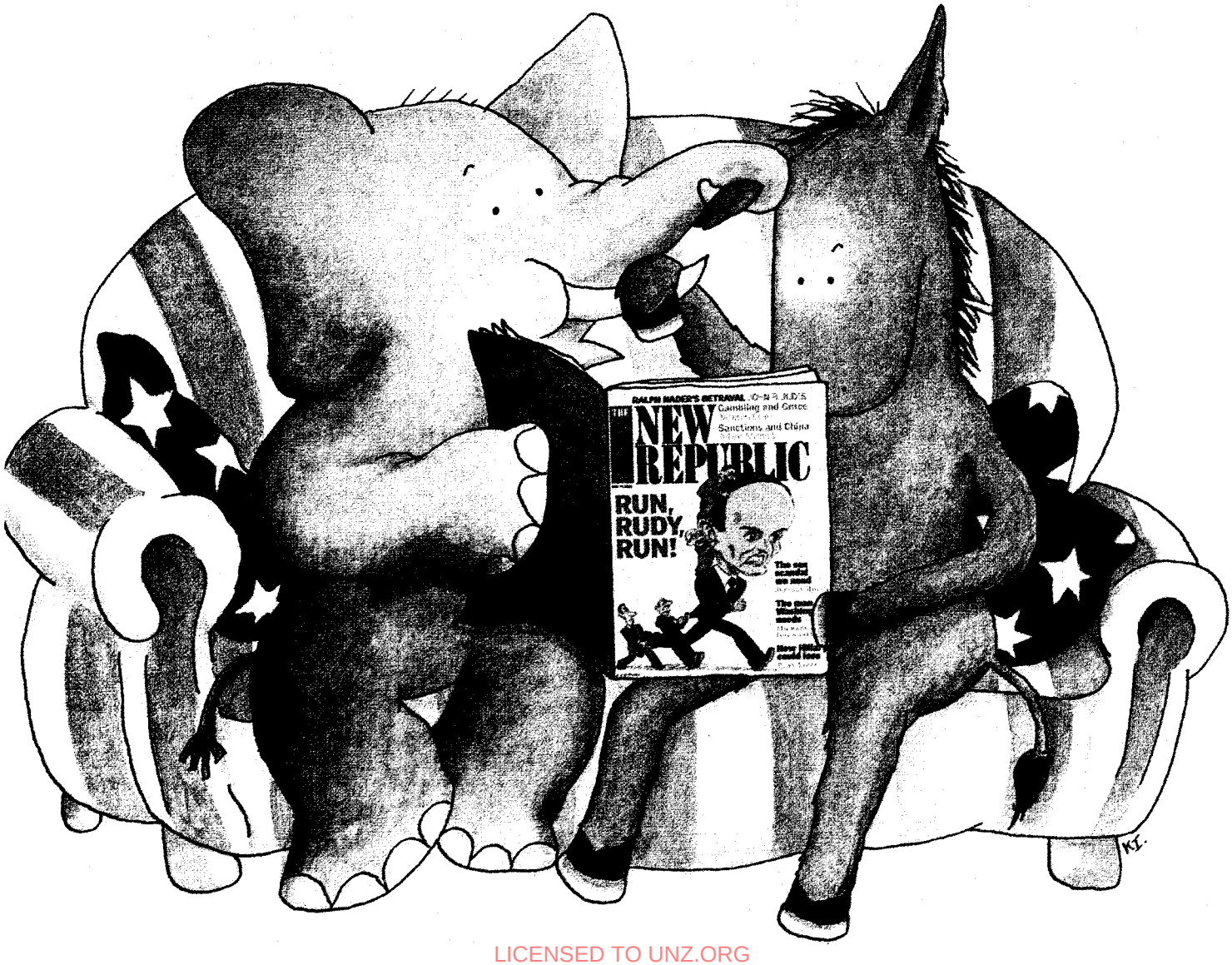

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matchups against no-name Republicans like Representatives Sue Kelly and Vito Fossella, Clinton never breaks 50 percent. And, while Zogby shows Giuliani dropping eleven points since December, none of that support has shifted to Clinton. The message, say some Lazio-boosters, is that Giuliani's polarizing persona deflected attention from Clinton's, and a less-well-defined Republican would have more success. They point to 1994, when outspoken Senator Alfonse D'Amato chose not to face Cuomo but instead anointed the unknown Pataki, who focused the race on Cuomo's vulnerable record. "Really, Hillary needs Giuliani to stay in," says Alan Crocket of Zogby International. With Giuliani out of the race, says one Lazio partisan, "the focus will be back on the foibles and frailties and shortcomings of Hillary Clinton."

Last year, conventional wisdom held that Giuliani could win because he'd cut into Clinton's margin in New York City. But today Lazio supporters turn that argument on its head. Lazio is polling as well in the city as Giuliani; in other words, Archie Bunker voters in the outer boroughs will vote against Clinton no matter what. To be sure, Lazio only gets one-quarter of the vote in Gotham, but that's about all he needs. In 1994, when Pataki became governor, Cuomo beat him in the city 70 percent to 28 percent. Some Republicans go even further, speculating that Lazio would do *better* than Giuliani in New York City because Rudy-hatred would spawn a huge black and Latino turnout for Hillary, a turnout that wouldn't materialize against the less-confrontational Lazio.

Then there's the contention that Lazio lacks the "stature" and money to take on a celebrity like Clinton. But that's what they told Pataki, too. If Lazio gets the nomination, he will be instantly known not just in New York but around the country. He already has almost $4 million in the bank, and it is inconceivable that Republicans would allow Clinton's opponent to be underfunded. "This isn't a candidacy against Mrs. Clinton," says GOP strategist Jay Severin. "This is jihad. This is a holy war. For Republicans there is no higher calling. You could run a character from cyberspace. Money will not be a factor."

Lazio also appears better-suited to take advantage of New York's complicated third-party math. Conservative Party leader Michael Long has indicated that his party would likely endorse Lazio, a move that could help deliver some 300,000 votes. Again, Lazio would be following Pataki's successful formula. In 1994, Pataki blocked a Conservative Party challenger, won the party's endorsement, and rallied his ideological base without alienating moderates. Giuliani, because he refuses to support a ban on partial-birth abortion, can't win Long's backing, and that has left the mayor fighting Clinton for the Liberal Party's endorsement instead.

CLINTON'S AIDES ALREADY have Lazio on the brain, and their line of attack is clear. They will try to define him as a conservative ideologue who rose to power as a tool of the far right. They will point out that he signed the Contract with America in 1994 and supported its major provisions in 1995. They'll remind voters that Lazio was a close ally of Newt Gingrich and is now an appointed assistant to House Majority Leader Dick Armey. They'll ask Lazio why he voted for the NRA-backed firearms legislation that passed the House last year when pro-gun-control members opposed it. They'll hit him for not being sufficiently pro-choice because of his stand on partial-birth abortion and because he has supported the Hyde Amendment, which bars federal money for abortions. Soccer moms will be told about his backing of vouchers, which are not popular in the suburbs, and the elderly will be informed of his support for partial privatization of Social Security. Finally, New Yorkers will be reminded that, despite personal pleading by the president, Lazio voted to impeach Hillary's husband.

But painting Lazio as a crazy right-winger won't be that simple. The Suffolk County congressman's career has been defined by a laserlike centrism in which each decision seems to have been calibrated for its impact on a future statewide campaign. In one of his first major votes in Congress in 1993, Lazio was the only Republican on the Budget Committee to vote against a GOP alternative budget because he didn't like its proposed cuts in Medicare. He voted for the Brady Bill. He fought efforts to cut funding for the National Endowment for the Arts. He favors a ban on soft money. He has a 100 percent rating from the Sierra Club and has been endorsed by the League of Conservation Voters. In the last two months, with an eye on the Senate, he has sponsored a bill to clean up Long Island Sound and another to provide therapy to low-income women suffering from breast and cervical cancer.

Rick Lazio is a politician calculated not to offend, a Milquetoast Republican without sharp edges or fiery convictions. In short, he's probably a smarter choice than Rudy Giuliani to run against Hillary Clinton. But watching him do so wouldn't be nearly as much fun. ■

Bush versus Social Security.

Bold Over

By JONATHAN CHAIT

GEORGE W. BUSH'S plan for Social Security is "bold." So says the Texas governor himself, whose speech last Monday announcing the plan rang with calls for "leadership" and scorn for "shoving [Social Security's problems] off for others to handle." And so say most of the media. "It is very bold for him to be getting into this," reported one CNN producer, "because it is the famous third rail of American politics." Explained *U.S. News & World Report*, "Bush is tossing aside conventional campaign wisdom and putting his hands firmly on the third rail of American politics."

This view is wrong—not because of any bias, but because of a basic misunderstanding. Social Security is the third rail of American politics because politicians are famously reluctant to propose the benefits cuts or tax increases necessary to keep

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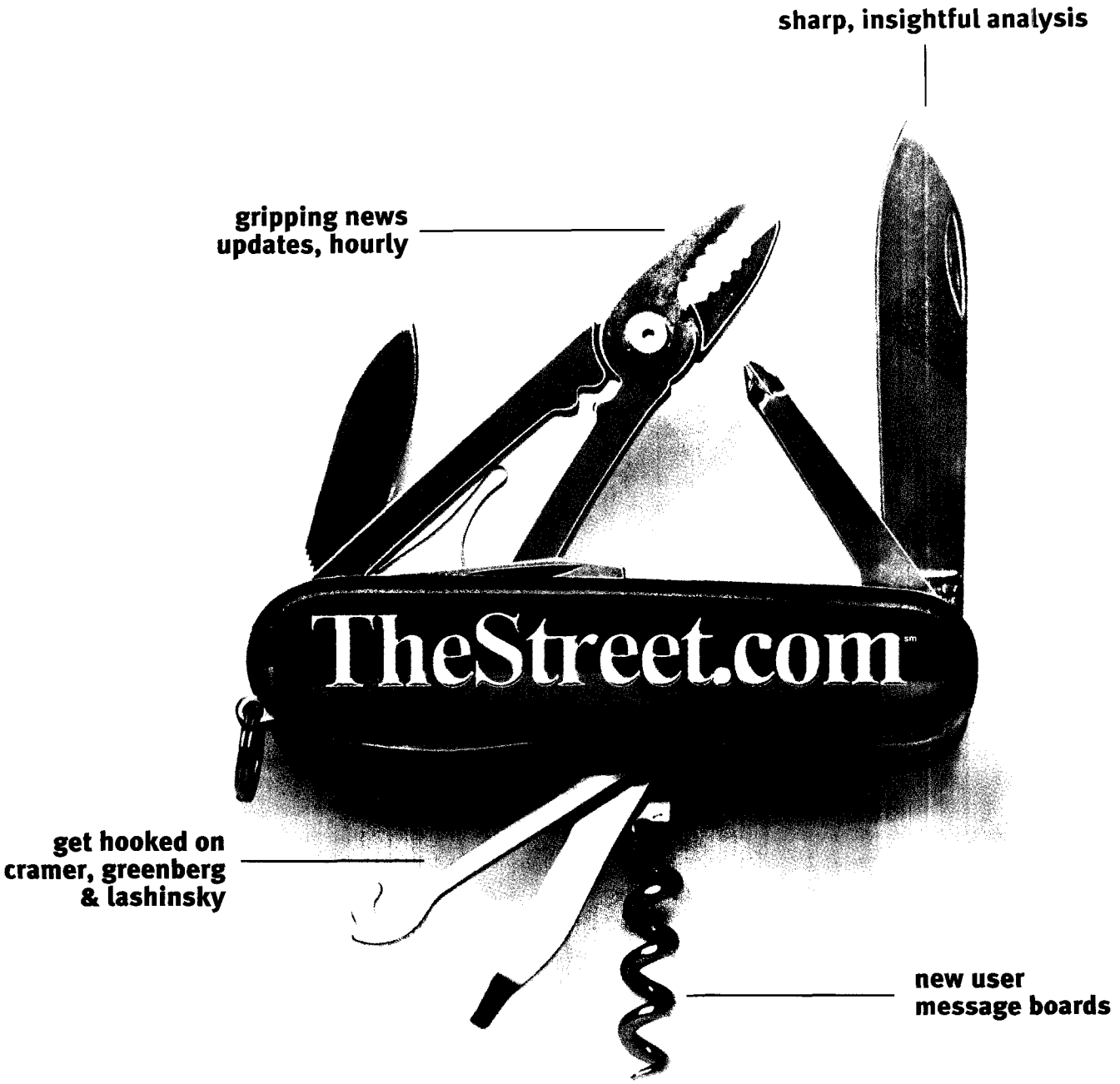

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the cherished program out of the red. Bush's purportedly bold plan doesn't propose these either. The governor's only specific reform is the establishment of private retirement accounts within Social Security. Not only would this not keep Social Security out of the hole, but it could actually make the agency's financial problems even worse.

The arithmetic is simple. Right now, workers' payroll taxes flow into the Social Security trust fund. Bush's plan would let workers keep a portion of their payroll taxes—instead of depositing the tax money into the trust fund, they would deposit it into their own accounts. So Bush is essentially proposing a tax cut. Instead of giving the money to the government, you get to keep it; the only requirement is that you must put it into a savings account. Since less money would flow into the trust fund, the imbalance between Social Security taxes and benefits would grow even larger. As it stands now, Social Security's benefits are projected to exceed taxes by about 15 percent over the next 75 years. Bush's plan—according to newspaper reports—would divert another 15 percent of payroll taxes from the trust fund into private accounts. That is to say, he would dig the hole deeper than it already is.

There is a case for privatization: The addition of individual accounts, with their high-yielding stocks, would in theory soften the blow of cutting regular Social Security benefits. This is not necessarily a popular argument. Social Security benefits are fairly low already—about $1,000 a month for the average retiree—and reducing the guaranteed income even further in order to speculate on private accounts might strike a lot of workers as a bad risk. But at least this is an honest fiscal argument.

Trouble is, Bush doesn't make this argument. He never spells out the cuts in regular benefits that he would enact to make room for private accounts. He doesn't even say such cuts would be necessary. (When pressed, he said, "It's conceivable.") It's completely understandable for a presidential candidate to run for office without releasing a detailed blueprint of the financial pain he plans to inflict upon his constituents when elected. The extraordinary thing is that Bush is getting credit for making voters take their castor oil when he's really promising more dessert.

HOW HAS HE gotten away with this? By conflating two different notions: *saving* Social Security—that precise three-word phrase was draped across the backdrop behind Bush as he gave his speech—and *privatizing* Social Security. The first is a technical question, a matter of making a row of numbers add up. The second question is deeply ideological, a decision about basic societal obligations. Bush is proposing the latter in the guise of the former.

Privatized Social Security is not simply a newer, spiffed-up version of the program. The ideological assumptions embedded in privatization are deeply antithetical to the basic purposes of Social Security. This is apparent in the claims Bush and others make on privatization's behalf. "There is a fundamental difference between my opponent and me," declares Bush. "He trusts only government to manage our retirement. I trust individual Americans. I trust Americans to make their own decisions and manage their own money."

Bush acts as if this concept were new. It's not. Indeed, the United States once had a retirement system in which individuals made their own decisions and managed their own money. This system would best be described as "nothing." It's what we had before 1935, and it didn't work terribly well: people who didn't earn lavish incomes over the course of their working lives often ended up in poverty, as did those who gambled on risky investments and lost. That's why FDR's administration created Social Security: to make sure every worker got a pension sufficient to pay for basic necessities like food and shelter. A fully privatized program would essentially return us to the system—or lack thereof—that existed 65 years ago.

Does the comparison sound exaggerated? Let's try a short thought experiment. Imagine a fully private Social Security system. Instead of depositing your payroll taxes into a government fund and being paid a pension when you retire, you would deposit your money into a personal account. At this point, the money in your account is yours alone. Indeed, privatization advocates are explicit about this. "This is the best thing about personal accounts," says Bush. "They are not just a program; they are your property."

But, since it's private property, what right does the government have to tell you what to do with it? Suppose you want to use the money in your account for a down payment on a home or car or for a child's education? There would be no reason, save rank paternalism, for the feds to stop you. (Bush says the accounts could be used only for retirement. But the government once said the same thing about other kinds of retirement vehicles, such as IRAs and 401(k)s, which have since been authorized for an ever-growing list of purposes.) At this point, the system would be as follows: You decide how much money to save for retirement and invest it as you see fit. The result would be exactly as if we simply abolished Social Security.

CONSERVATIVES HAVE LAID the groundwork for such a possibility in recent years by positing the existence of what they call "the investor class"—that is, the Americans who own stock. In the last two decades this proportion has grown from 16 percent of Americans to nearly 50 percent. This frequently cited number conjures up an image of market-savvy citizens, merrily clicking away on Ameritrade, no longer in need of a nanny state to secure their golden years. The statistic itself is misleading—most of these stockholders own little stock, and it sits in company pension plans or other vehicles over which they exercise little, if any, day-to-day control.

The broader implication of the investor-class theory is even more wrong. The perils of individual saving that led to the creation of Social Security still exist today. For instance, since you can't be sure how long you will live, you can't allot yourself too great a pension for fear that you will outlive your savings. Social Security addresses that problem by offering a fixed annual pension. Another risk is that you can't know whether you might suffer a decline in income or an illness or injury that prevents you from working altogether. Social Security solves this by giving disabled and low-income workers well more than they paid in taxes. These kinds of transfers

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are only possible if all workers pay their taxes into a collective fund. Once you individualize the system, it's every man for himself.

Privatization advocates do not dispute the logic of social insurance so much as assume it away. Incessantly, they tout the superior profitability of private accounts, as though that were the sole criterion of a public retirement system. Bush says, "Even if a worker chose only the safest investment in the world—an inflation-adjusted U.S. government bond—he or she would receive twice the rate of return of Social Security." But the Social Security trust fund *is* invested in government bonds. The reason it provides a lower "rate of return" is that much of the money is siphoned off for transfers to widows, the disabled, and others. Privatization offers a higher rate of return because it abandons those social burdens.

BUSH, OF COURSE, does not advocate complete privatization. He supports partial privatization—that is, creating relatively small personal accounts within the existing system. One problem with partial privatization is that it crowds out resources needed to shore up Social Security—every dollar diverted to private accounts is one dollar fewer available for social insurance. To get the scheme to work, you have to cut benefits or raise taxes more than would be necessary if you just reformed Social Security without privatizing it. But the greater peril is that such a hybrid system, by its very design, is predisposed to lead inexorably toward total privatization. Bush himself, wandering off-script during a question-and-answer session, said his plan "could be the first step toward a complete privatization."

The danger that partial privatization will lead to complete privatization is not some hyperbolic "camel's nose in the tent" scenario. The creation of individual accounts would encourage workers to think of Social Security the way conservatives do: as a low-yielding investment account rather than as social insurance. When they compare the rate of return on their regular Social Security (which is invested in low-yield government bonds and much of which goes to anonymous unfortunates) with the rate of return on their private accounts (which may be invested in high-yield stocks, the proceeds of which they keep for themselves), it is nearly inevitable that they will demand that more and more go to their private accounts.

Bush, cleverly, has turned this into a moral argument. "Al Gore, who calls these bipartisan proposals risky, has a substantial amount of his money invested in the stock market," he claims (erroneously). "Why does he object to young Americans doing the same?" Of course Gore does not object to young Americans, or anybody else, having money in the stock market; he objects to cutting a guaranteed benefit in order for them to do so.

Bush's point, though, has some merit. It *isn't* fair that the high returns of the stock market solely benefit the well-off. The answer to this is to establish subsidized personal savings accounts for low-wage workers. The Clinton administration, in fact, has proposed something just like this. It would be a way for poorer Americans to build personal wealth without threatening Social Security—which, perhaps, is why Republicans have shown no interest in the idea.

The tragic irony is that for years the Democrats refused to contemplate the small benefits cuts needed to keep the system whole, and their Chicken Little warnings that conservatives were plotting to destroy Social Security grew tiresome. Now conservatives really *are* plotting to destroy Social Security. If Bush succeeds, the Democrats may have only themselves to blame. ■

The sex scandal we've been waiting for.

Pro-Choice

By JEFFREY ROSEN

ALL LAST WEEK, moralizing pundits urged New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani to drop out of the New York Senate race because his personal life had become extraordinarily embarrassing. I don't know whether he will take their advice; at press time, he said he was inclined to run. For the sake of the nation, he should. Giuliani has given us the first pristine example of adultery in the post-Gary Hart era, uncluttered by the usual ginned-up secondary charges of perjury, abuse of power, and hypocrisy. By continuing with his campaign, Giuliani would allow the public to do something it couldn't do in the case of Hart (who dropped out of the presidential race), Bob Livingston (who resigned), Newt Gingrich (who retired), or even Bill Clinton (who can't run for a third term): judge the political significance of adultery in the democratic arena.

The most sophisticated conservative call for Giuliani to throw in the towel comes from William Safire of *The New York Times*. Giuliani's misbehavior is nothing like Clinton's, Safire insists, because "political anger at Clinton was directed at his serial obstructions, harassments and lies, which amounted to wrongdoing on a grand scale—and not at his fidelity shortfalls." But Giuliani should drop out anyway, Safire concludes, to make room for a more politically viable candidate.

This argument is unconvincing on both counts. In an age that criminalizes sex and politics, it would have been easy for a politically motivated coworker or prosecutor to start investigating Giuliani's relationship with his former communications director, Cristyne Lategano, on the grounds that the mayor committed illegal sexual favoritism when he promoted her to the post of president of New York's tourism bureau. In the end, the case would have been dismissed: courts have generally held that, although a pattern of sexual favoritism may add up to sex discrimination for disfavored workers, it's not illegal to promote an isolated paramour. But, while investigating Giuliani's relationship with Lategano, the prosecutor might well have tricked the mayor into

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denying the relationship under oath, since he had already denied it at a press conference. (Giuliani continues to deny his wife's allegation that his relationship with Lategano was sexual; a meticulous prosecutor might settle the matter by DNA-testing the linens at Gracie Mansion.) The fact that Giuliani, unlike Clinton, had the good luck not to be set upon by a prosecutor and hauled before a perjury-trapped grand jury doesn't excuse his conduct; it merely provides the public with an opportunity to judge it on its own terms.

Safire and others would short-circuit this valuable process of social judgment, calling on the mayor to step down because he has become, as *Times* columnist Bob Herbert puts it, "a toxic presence ... a target for ridicule by comedians across the country." This attempt to create a self-fulfilling prophecy about Giuliani's political vulnerability is not only hasty; it is undemocratic. As in the case of Clinton, public moralizers are outraged that the public seems less outraged than they are. As soon as Kenneth Starr revealed that he was investigating Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky, pundits predicted Clinton would resign immediately because he had become a subject of ridicule. But, as it turned out, initial ridicule and anger quickly gave way to more nuanced sentiments as the unscrupulousness of Clinton's prosecutors and the sanctimony and hypocrisy of his opponents were weighed against Clinton's own sins. The public ridicule to which commentators referred turned out to be mostly their own.

In Giuliani's case, public opinion may already be undergoing a similar shift. On May 12, two days after Giuliani's press conference, the *Times* reported that only two of the eleven undecided voters it had been tracking thought that Giuliani remained an "attractive and viable candidate" now that he had humiliated his wife. By contrast, two days later, on May 14, the *Times* reported that some voters were coming around to the mayor's side because his display of vulnerability had humanized him. "Now he has problems that all of us can relate to," gushed a graphic designer struck by Giuliani's emotionalism. The latest Zogby poll doesn't show a dramatic slide toward Giuliani; it shows a dead heat. Over the course of a long campaign, as more details about Giuliani's marriage emerge, public opinion may shift further still, perhaps eventually crystallizing into a social consensus whose contours, at the moment, are impossible to predict.

In contrast to its columnists, the *Times*' news pages have done exactly the right thing. The paper respected Giuliani's privacy when he respected it himself, neither denying nor flaunting his relationship with Judith Nathan. Once Giuliani began to act out his marital difficulties in public by announcing the end of his marriage at a press conference before informing his wife, he made his reckless personal behavior a matter of public record. But the *Times* has reported Giuliani's behavior responsibly, laying his actions and his deliberations before the public without allowing them to overwhelm all other aspects of the paper's coverage of the Senate campaign. The danger is that the tabloids, local TV networks, and *Times* columnists, by shouting down Giuliani's attempts to speak about anything other than his marriage, will create a fait accompli, preventing the public from making up its own mind.

The process of democratic judgment takes time—far more time than the weeklong news cycles during which our public dramas are expected to be presented and neatly resolved. In a hierarchical society such as sixteenth-century Spain, the *partidas* defined dishonor or "infamy" with legalistic precision. A woman taken in adultery, or a woman who cohabited with a man less than a year after the death of her husband, was considered shameful, rather than honorable, and suffered the social equivalent of death. By contrast, in a pluralistic democracy, people have a remarkably diverse and complicated range of beliefs and intuitions about the social significance of adultery, in all of its manifestations.

ROB BABBONI

Given this diversity of views, it's all the more important, once sexual indiscretions are exposed, that as many citizens as possible have a chance to form a considered judgment, which can only emerge slowly as the full range of a public official's complicated and often contradictory character is weighed in the balance. Privacy protects most citizens from the indignity of being judged out of context in a world of short attention spans or judged on the basis of isolated bits of information rather than genuine knowledge. By contrast, trans-

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parency, despite its brutalizing effects on the individuals concerned, allows the small group of public officials who have unlimited access to the nation's attention to be evaluated whole, in all of their various dimensions.

By arguing that Giuliani should remain in the race and allow the considered judgment of the public to crystallize, I don't mean to suggest that adultery, once it is exposed, is a purely private matter that has no political or social significance. Like President Clinton, Giuliani shouldn't be allowed to take refuge behind the spurious argument that his conduct wasn't shameful merely because it wasn't illegal. (As it happens, adultery is illegal, at least in the District of Columbia, but that's a law that not even the most enthusiastic proponents of "zero tolerance" are willing to enforce.) But the public significance of Giuliani's adultery isn't yet clear. In fact, more than a decade after Gary Hart, we know a great deal about how the sanctimonious press reacts to infidelity and remarkably little about how the public does, once given the chance to weigh it at the ballot box. Now we may finally get to find out. By staying in the race and submitting himself to public judgment, Giuliani would allow the people to decide just what sort of man he is. Isn't that what democracy is for? ■

Ralph Nader betrays himself.

Seeing Green

By JOHN B. JUDIS

ON A DRIZZLY May afternoon in Detroit, Michigan, Ralph Nader is standing before about 100 supporters. His graying hair tousled, his features gnarled with age, the Green Party presidential hopeful launches into an attack on his new favorite target, Vice President Al Gore. "What is the difference between Bush and Gore on corporate issues?" Nader asks. "I'll grant you, on civil rights issues and social service, there is a difference. But, on the big issue of whether our corporate government is going to take over our political government in Washington, you know what the difference is. The difference is the velocity with which their knees hit the floor when the corporations come knocking at the door."

Today in Detroit, as he will tonight in Madison, Wisconsin, and tomorrow in Raleigh and Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Nader speaks extemporaneously for an hour and then takes questions. He makes the same general indictment each time—that we have "lost control of our lives to the corporations"—and illustrates the point with disquisitions on how the owners of professional sports teams fleece cities, how agribusiness boycotts industrial hemp, and how the 1872 Mining Act cheats Americans out of their natural heritage. The audiences sit in rapt attention; afterward, they crowd the stage to enlist as volunteers.

Invariably, someone asks Nader how he justifies a campaign that could take enough votes from Gore to hand the election to Texas Governor George W. Bush. Nader responds that on key economic issues there is no difference between Democrats and Republicans or between Gore and Bush. "Both parties are subordinating their obligations to represent the American people to global corporations who have no allegiance to our country and no allegiance to community," he says in Detroit. In an interview with the editors of an alternative newspaper in Chapel Hill, he charges that Gore "speaks with chattering teeth and forked tongue. He is a coward from top to bottom."

In Detroit, Nader says his goal "is to build a new progressive political party that says to the Democratic Party, 'If you don't shape up, you're going to ship out.'" Asked in Chapel Hill whether he can actually win, he all but admits that's not his real goal. "Do you really want a Pat Buchanan answer—about what I will do when I am president?" Nader says, laughing. "The truth is you can't lose. You bring thousands of people into the progressive political community. That's a win. If you get five percent, you get federal funds the next time. You cost the Democrats a few states. They'll never be the same again."

He may be right. When Nader ran for president as the Green Party candidate in 1996, he did not even campaign. He spent less than $5,000 and got on the ballot in only a handful of states. Yet he still managed to win enough votes in one state (Colorado) to tilt it from Bill Clinton to Bob Dole. This year, Nader is running in earnest. He plans to get on the ballot in at least 45 states. He hopes to raise $5 million, and he just might—given that he can draw on the Hollywood left, trial lawyers, and a direct-mail network built up over many years. (In just six weeks as a candidate, he's raised nearly $350,000.) Already, Nader is getting five percent in national polls; in California, he gets close to ten percent.

To cost Gore the election, Nader needs three to five percent of the vote in a few closely contested states: Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. And that's a real possibility. In the past, Nader's jeremiads against corporations, his difficult, detail-packed speeches, his rumpled suits, and his folder of clippings have appealed primarily to the activist left. But this year, in the wake of Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura and Arizona Senator John McCain, Nader may also appeal to the unattached and alienated quarter of the electorate that sees both the GOP and the Democrats as controlled by "special interests" and that responds to candidates who represent a break from "politics as usual," regardless of their ideology.

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In short, 2000 may be the year Ralph Nader has been waiting for his whole career. But, for someone like myself who has for years admired Nader as a champion of workers and consumers, this campaign does not represent the culmination of his life's work. It represents its betrayal. For the last four decades, the gangly Nader has loomed large in American politics precisely because, unlike so many other radicals, he has not merely ranted about the system. He's actually tried to fix it. He founded the modern consumer movement; he played a critical role in getting government to pay attention to automobile safety, environmental pollution, and workers' health and protection. Most recently, he helped inspire the government antitrust suit against Microsoft.

As a candidate this year, by contrast, Nader seems determined, even eager, to play a destructive role. His campaign bears the mark of the Manichaean left. He doesn't merely criticize corporate power; he turns it into a bogeyman and elevates the struggle with corporations into an apocalyptic conflict between good and evil. He primarily attacks not conservatives but Democrats, who share many of his objectives. And he promotes the classic sectarian canard: that by undermining the politician immediately to his right, namely Al Gore, he can bring about the victory of a purer left.

NADER'S SECTARIANISM IS most apparent in his current rhetoric about the market. In the past, Nader avoided the left's doctrinaire opposition to capitalism per se. The son of a restaurant owner, Nader was not a socialist but a democratic pluralist who wanted workers and consumers to balance—rather than overwhelm—the power of business. While Students for a Democratic Society called for world revolution, Nader, designated as one of the Junior Chamber of Commerce's outstanding young men in 1966, was lobbying Congress to pass the Wholesale Meat Act and the Natural Gas Pipeline Safety Act. He seemed to understand that the competitive market and the corporate form of business organization, which facilitates investment, have helped fuel America's spectacular economic growth. He also acknowledged that corporations and corporate leaders could act for good as well as ill. As a result, Nader enjoyed the support of some small businessmen and even of a select group of progressive corporate executives and bankers who understood he was more reformer than revolutionary.

But, in this campaign, Nader is more revolutionary than reformer. He has adopted the radical left's demonology, describing corporations as "operationally evil" or as "monsters." He also blames business leaders and corporations for every ill of the past 200 years, including some for which, quite plainly, they were not solely or principally responsible. Nader told students at the University of Wisconsin, "It was the industrialists who didn't want women to have the vote." That's misleading at best. Business leaders were divided on suffrage, as were women and workers. And the major national business organizations took no position on the issue. But Nader is not interested in facts. He is looking at the history of business through the prism of the sectarian left.

Think I'm overstating? Nader also told students in Madison how multinational corporations "roam the world ... cutting contracts with companies to take brutalized child labor in the hundreds of millions." By current estimates, there are about 250 million child laborers, but only five percent of them work in export industries. Nader is off by 2,000 percent or more. In addition, Nader told students that "the business community in this country had slaves for three hundred years." I guess those Whig businessmen in the North don't count. And he told them that the Gap "sourced out to nine-, ten-, eleven-, twelve-, thirteen-year-olds in brutal child labor abroad." In June 1995, the National Labor Committee accused the Gap of buying goods from a Salvadorean factory employing 14- to 17-year-olds. The Gap agreed to stop doing it.

NADER'S SECTARIANISM IS just as apparent in his selective history of the Democratic Party. Since the mid-'70s, business—organized through lobbies, law firms, and policy groups and allied with conservative Republicans—has had the upper hand in Washington. Whenever Democrats have directly challenged the distribution of wealth and power—through bills to reform labor law, establish a consumer-protection agency, or even contain hospital costs—business lobbies have beaten them. Business has also rolled back many of the regulatory gains that Nader and congressional liberals achieved in the early '70s. As of 1997, the Consumer Product Safety Commission employed 43 percent fewer people than it did in 1974, just two years after its establishment. As of this year, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has 23 percent fewer employees than it did 20 years ago.

The relevant question, though, is whether the Democrats are as responsible for these setbacks as the Republicans. Nader says they are, charging that "the corporatists" have taken over the Democratic Party and that under Clinton and Gore "the right-wing gains are worse than under Reagan and Bush." When I pressed him for evidence that the Democrats were even more pliant than the Republicans, he referred me to a study of OSHA by Public Citizen, an organization he founded, that shows, he said, that the agency fared worse under Clinton than it did during the Bush administration. The study, which covers from 1972 to 1998, does show that OSHA inspections declined during the Clinton administration, particularly from 1994 to 1996, the years in which the Republicans won control of Congress. But, according to Peg Seminario, director of the AFL-CIO's department of occupational safety and health, that decline in enforcement was due to dramatic reductions in personnel in 1995 and 1996—reductions made as the result of budget cuts dictated by the new GOP Congress. Since then, however, freed from the extreme spending reductions imposed to combat the deficit, the Clinton administration has successfully restored OSHA's spending and staff. In fact, in 1999, which is not included in the Public Citizen study, spending has increased rather dramatically—by more than eight percent.

The Clinton administration's management of the Environmental Protection Agency is a similar story. According to Gregory Whetstone of the Natural Resources Defense Council, the EPA under Clinton has been "far more aggressive" than it was under Bush and Reagan. "Comparatively speak-

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ing, this EPA has been very effective," Whetstone says. Indeed, while the president did accede to corporate pressure on many occasions, Nader's contention that the Clinton administration has been less protective of workers and consumers than were the Reagan and Bush administrations is self-serving and untrue.

SECTARIANISM EQUALLY COLORS Nader's view of Gore. The vice president, of course, has not proved to be an enormously effective candidate. But Nader is not merely contemptuous of his tactics; he is contemptuous of Gore's character, too, calling him the "consummate political coward" and a "coward from top to bottom." As with Clinton, Nader insists on turning Gore into a caricature. In fact, while his overall record is mixed, Gore has at times bucked business on risky votes. In 1978, the Business Roundtable specifically targeted Gore, then a second-term congressman from a fairly conservative Tennessee district, as part of its lobbying campaign against Nader's bill for a consumer-protection agency. Although the House defeated the measure, Gore voted for it. Gore also supported public financing of elections, not a popular position in Tennessee. And, although Gore came from a right-to-work state, he maintained a consistently pro-labor voting record. (The AFL-CIO gave him close to a 90 percent rating during his tenure in the Senate.)

Nader charges that Gore, while serving under Clinton, acquiesced to a deal that allowed auto companies to forgo increases in fuel-economy standards in return for constructing new "clean cars." The administration can be faulted for not raising fuel standards, but no such deal has been revealed. Clinton and Gore did back the "clean car" project, which has yet to deliver, but so did many liberals and environmentalists. Within the administration, Gore took the lead in fighting for the global-warming treaty, which was opposed by a powerful business coalition and by most Republicans in Congress. Unlike other New Democrats, he has also staunchly opposed even modest Social Security privatization, a Wall Street favorite. By contrast, George W. Bush, the man Nader seems happy to help elect, has already promised that, as president, he would champion legislation to restrict consumers' power to sue corporations and to hinder labor-union involvement in politics.

Like previous third-party candidates, Nader compares his effort to that of Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party of 1856 and 1860—implying that the Greens will eventually supplant the Democrats just as the GOP supplanted the Whigs. But a truer match is the Communist William Z. Foster's campaign in 1932. The Communists, convinced that liberal Democrats and Socialists, not conservative Republicans, were holding back the revolution, denounced Franklin D. Roosevelt and Norman Thomas as "social fascists." Luckily, few Americans listened. But Americans did listen to the radicals who opposed Hubert Humphrey in 1968 and 1972 and Jimmy Carter in 1980 for being insufficiently left-wing. And these sectarian criticisms led not to the triumph of a new left but to a conservative political realignment. Nader thinks he is building a new "progressive political community," but he may simply be helping conservative Republicans prolong their reign.

Nader's new extremism certainly won't be tempered by the Green Party, on whose ballot line he hopes to run. The decade-old Greens, composed of the competing Green Party USA and the Association of State Green Parties, include sensible environmentalists who think the Democrats are too enamored of automobile companies. But they also include fringe animal-rights activists and aging hippies obsessed with legalizing drugs. At the June 24 Green Party convention in Denver, Nader will be challenged for the nomination by Jello Biafra, the former leader of the punk-rock band the Dead Kennedys, and Stephen Gaskin, founder of a hippie commune in Tennessee. Biafra wants to "abolish the military" and "lower the voting age to five." Gaskin wants to ask all the candidates "what [they have] done for reefer sanity in the USA."

At the local level, the party is no better. In Michigan the Green Party is split between a faction concerned with labor rights and another, based at Oakland University, focused on animal rights. (Potential compromise: collective bargaining for minks?) In Wisconsin, the Green Party's gubernatorial candidate expressed his fervent opposition to a corporate training center recently built by the university. He didn't oppose what it was going to teach the managers but the fact that it was teaching them at all. During dinner with Nader and the head of the North Carolina Greens at a vegetarian restaurant in Chapel Hill, I asked Nader why he had inveighed against hog farms in a speech earlier that day. Before Nader could reply, the Green Party representative explained that such farms encourage the consumption of meat. I looked over at Nader, and he said gently to his comrade, "I don't think we can be against carnivores."

Of course, in other states, like California and New Mexico, the Greens will be more of a help than a hindrance. Nader can also draw on the growing ferment on and around college campuses. Like the pre-Vietnam New Left of the early '60s, the new movements are primarily the product of prosperity rather than recession—of students who do not have to worry whether they will get jobs after college but can worry instead about child laborers in India and toxic-waste dumps near minority communities. They see corporations and international economic organizations in the same simplistic, demonized way Nader does. (In Madison, student picketers shouted, "Corporate scum, here we come!" in front of the corporate training center.) And they will probably organize unruly protests if Nader is excluded from the presidential debates this fall.

The Gore campaign still does not take Nader seriously; one adviser told me they were more worried about Buchanan winning Democratic blue-collar voters than about Nader mobilizing left-wingers. But this complacency could prove misplaced. Since the presidential campaign started last summer, there have already been two major political surprises: the large, militant demonstrations against globalization in Seattle and McCain's burst of strength in the Republican primaries. While these two events share little on the surface, both reflect a two-party system that is probably less stable than we yet realize. Nader's run could prove the third surprise event of this year's campaign. That's bad news for Al Gore, and probably for the rest of us as well. ■

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

The Mind and the Mindless

One of the cherished anecdotes in film history concerns Jean-Paul Sartre. Around 1961 John Huston decided to make a biographical film about Sigmund Freud, and he commissioned Sartre to write the screenplay, In time Sartre turned in a script—400 pages long. Huston conferred with Sartre, explaining that this script would run about three times the length of a long picture. Sartre went away to revise the screenplay, then sent in one of 600 pages.

Huston summoned Hollywood hands to prune it. Finally he made a two-hours-plus picture called *Freud: The Secret Passion*, starring Montgomery Clift, a film that seemed to groan throughout with a variety of discomforts.

Another, much superior Freud film has recently come to light—to American light, anyway. In 1977 the Austrian director Axel Corti made **Young Dr. Freud** (Kino) for Austrian and German TV. It was shown last July by the critic Stuart Klawans as part of a Freud exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York, and it is now having its American theatrical premiere at the New York Film Forum. The subject is obviously interesting in itself but, for me, is made even more so by the director. In 1988 the Film Forum showed a fascinating trilogy by Corti about postwar Vienna. I knew that Corti had died in 1993, and I thought we would hear no more from him. Now comes this unexpected boon.

The screenplay by Georg Stefan Troller, who wrote the trilogy, shows little of the pinching and nagging that I remember from Huston's film, the worry about holding the general audience. This Troller-Corti film concentrates on what it has to do. Though my knowledge of Freud's life and thought is not quite imperial, I could sense condensations, and experts would surely find more. Also, as Margarethe Von Trotta found in her *Rosa Luxemburg*, we see again that it is highly difficult to dramatize intellectual adventure. Yet Corti's film engrosses with its account of the arrival of a young Jewish genius struggling early in his career to find exactly what he is a genius at.

The word "Jewish" is not an incidental datum. He was born, in 1856, Sigismund Schlomo Freud. He did not alter his name until 1877, when he was a university student in Vienna, presumably as a concession to the anti-Semitic climate of Austria, still, with no strenuous attempt at disguise. The screenplay deals with his boyhood, youth and early manhood, but it is framed with the aged Freud's departure from Austria in 1938, courtesy of the Gestapo. With no kind of blatant heart-tug, the film shows that this titan's work was accomplished, in some degree, despite his world's attitude toward a Schlomo. (I emphasize that the picture was made for Austrian-German viewers.)

Troller and Corti devised such an ingenious structural device for their *Freud* and cast it so splendidly that the film's very existence seems an enhancement of its subject. After the prologue, with the old man leaving Vienna, we go back to his boyhood. This is deftly done with a quick succession of Freud photographic portraits in reverse chronological order. Then we are in the streets of Freiberg, in Moravia, where he was born. But there, along with us, is the young Viennese Dr. Freud, observing. An unseen interviewer asks him to explain what is happening. Freud tells the camera that the man and the boy coming down the muddy street are his father and himself, and we see—triply, through the event itself, through the eyes of the young doctor remembering it, and through the interviewer who is our vicar—a man harassing his father, a Jew, for daring to walk on the pavement. The man forces the father and son to walk in the mud. It's not an encounter that the boy forgets.

As a sample of Corti's artistry, here is one brief scene, incised as though by a diamond cutter. Freud *père* applies to a minor Freiberg official for permission, which Jews needed, to move to another town. This pettifogging official offhandedly asks questions of the father and makes offensive remarks, while the whole time he concentrates on a cigarette butt that he is nursing.. It's the sort of vignette for which the Moscow Art Theater was once renowned.

The unseen interviewer recurs throughout the film but never so intrusively that he harms the reality of what we are watching. Instead, he increases our sense of currency. Some of the highlights: Freud's career move into medicine, then into neurology, his engagement to Martha Bernays, his entrance into the mind's mysteries (whetted by Josef Breuer), the initial adverse reaction of doctors to his discoveries, his fellowship to study in Paris with Charcot, Breuer's success with the patient later known as Anna O., and the progress toward the Breuer-Freud *Studies in Hysteria*. None of this chronicle feels like commonplace "enacted" documentary because of Corti's exquisite direction, Wolfgang Treu's fine black-and-white cinematography, Barbara Langbein's lovely costume designs, and—as crown—the quality of the acting. I cite only Karlheinz Hackl (Freud), Silvia Haider (Martha Bernays), Karl Merkatz (Breuer), Marianne Nentwich (Bertha Pappenheim, later called Anna O.), and Jacques Alric (Charcot), but the entire company is flawless.

In a recent interview, Philip Roth referred to Freud as "this great tragic poet, our Sophocles." I can't quite say that Corti's film affirms Roth—it deals only with the early years—but it certainly shows the opening of the path to Roth's accolade.

Passion of Mind (Paramount Classics) is not, despite its title, a sequel to *Young Dr. Freud*, even though it has two psychoanalysts in it. It is a vehicle for Demi Moore, and it is one more reworking of the old double-life idea. Her character has two existences—one possibly a dream, the other possibly real—and she can't decide which is which. (She has an analyst in each of her lives.) The screenplay is by Ronald Bass, who wrote *My Best Friend's Wedding* and co-wrote the admirable *Rain Man*; the director was Alain Berliner who made the delicate *Ma vie en rose*, about a boy who wants to be a girl; but this time Bass and Berliner have disgorged a romance that is mindless, pointless, far-out even as fantasy.

First, we meet the Moore who is an American widow living in the French countryside with her two small daughters. (She apparently supports her comfy lifestyle with book reviews for *The New York Times*. Do I need to put an exclamation point after that sentence?) A novelist—the usual taciturn worldly loner—arrives

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nearby, and a romance evolves. Second, intercut throughout with the first story, we see Moore as a slick New York literary agent, unmarried, and a romance evolves for her with a man in her business life. Each Moore is aware of the other one's existence, and each consults her analyst about her doubleness. At last, she must choose. With this film, the finish deserves tipping: the book-reviewing Moore abandons her two small daughters in France and concentrates on being a literary agent in New York. How much further could fantasy go?

Very early on we are aware that it's all flummery, but we could let it flow amusingly past if it were not for the presence of Stellan Skarsgard as the novelist in France. Skarsgard, a Swede whom I first saw in Ingmar Bergman's theater company in New York, is a wooden, dull, uninflected actor. His frequent appearances in American films are becoming a kind of hair shirt for the cinematic faithful.

On the other hand, there's Moore. A curious, appealing case. She doesn't have much of what could validly be called talent, but she does have a kind of innocent daring. Apparently, she is willing to take on anything, and then put everything she has into it. A stripper, a Navy SEAL, Hester Prynne, this new double role, she does them all as if she were dared to do them in a charade at a party and has the gumption to attempt them. Unlike most other inadequate performers, there is something pathetically sweet about Moore's efforts to act. ■

Jed Perl on Art
Riddles of Style

In the boldly exploratory pen-and-ink studies of ancient Egyptian sculpture that Alberto Giacometti did in the 1930s and '40s, an artist is beginning again—which is what it means to lay out a few lines on a sheet of paper—as he contemplates what is in some sense the very beginning of Western art. These studies of Giacometti's, with their prodding intensity, come to mind at the close of a long season in which many of the most remarkable exhibitions in the museums have been shows of Egyptian art or shows of drawings. We have had three major exhibitions that focussed on the earliest civilization to leave us a vast store of visual art: "Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids," at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; "Pharaohs of the Sun: Akhenaten, Nefertiti, Tutankhamen," at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; and "Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt," also at the Metropolitan. And as for drawings, those traces of a painter's or sculptor's earliest thoughts and speculations, they have rarely had so powerful a cumulative impact as they did in two shows: "From Schongauer to Holbein: Master Drawings from Basel and Berlin," at the National Gallery; and "Watteau and His World: French Drawings from 1700 to 1750," at the Frick Collection.

Each of these extraordinary exhibitions raised two closely related questions. How does an artist begin? How does art begin? And these questions reminded me of Giacometti's exploration of the severe profile of a statue of an ancient Egyptian scribe, a drawing in which we see a twentieth-century artist going back to basics. In the mid-1930s, Giacometti, already a master Surrealist, was determined to reinvent himself as an artist who would draw, paint, and sculpt directly from the figure. Observing the portrait of a scribe—one of a series of monuments of Egyptian verisimilitude in which we seem to see, for the first time in history, the cool confidence of the self-made man—Giacometti zeroes in on the figure's implacable profile and distills all the cannily molded psychological complexities into a brusque geometry of quick, incisive lines.

As Giacometti focuses on the seamless inevitability of that Egyptian image, with its contained force, he strips himself of all the quirky fantasy touches that had marked him as a dreamer extraordinaire just a few years before. Giacometti's scribe was not in the Metropolitan's "Age of the Pyramids" show; but the unabashed realism of this work recalls a group of sculptures from the Fourth Dynasty that were well represented in the show, and are probably the earliest instances that we know of artists attempting to represent not man as god or king, but man exactly as he is.

One of the central attractions at the Metropolitan was *Hemiunu Seated*, a large statue that reflects the same kind of penetrating directness as Giacometti's scribe. Many museumgoers reacted to this figure, which presents an unforgivingly literal rendering of a hugely prosperous man's slack, middle-aged plumpness, as if they, like Giacometti, were seeing frankness itself. Of course, even museumgoers who know something of Giacometti are unlikely to be aware of his interest in the art of ancient Egypt. But in ways that are perhaps too complicated to ever entirely explain, the climate in which we all experience the art of the pre-classical Mediterranean has been shaped by the thoughts that generations of artists have had about that past.

Ancient Egypt's pop fascination—the allure that gives the Nile valley its blockbuster potential—is not all about pyramid power and King Tut's gold. The public values this primary, iconic view of man and nature that has drawn artists to Egyptian sculpture at least since John Flaxman, in his lectures to the Royal Academy in England in the early nineteenth century, praised this work for its "simplicity of idea" and "breadth of parts." The neoclassicists of Flaxman's day were touched by the dawn-of-art clarity of Egyptian sculpture, and its appeal has only deepened and widened as time has gone on.

Our period has a how-to sensibility. We want to see the underlying structure, we want to know how things got to be the way they are. Both the art of ancient Egypt and the art of drawing have a slate-wiped-clean primalism. If drawing tells us something about how paintings and sculptures get to look the way they do, Egypt functions as the prequel to the old familiar story of Greece. No wonder that E. H. Gombrich, back in the 1950s, chose to begin *Art and Illusion*, his "Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation," with a cartoon of a drawing class in ancient Egypt. In this cartoon by Daniel Alain, which appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1955, eleven students are working from a model who stands in front of them in the pose we know from Egyptian wall paintings—head, legs, and arms in profile, the torso basically frontal. Gombrich explains that this cartoon "should explain much more quickly than I could in words what is ... meant by the 'riddle of style.'"

"Why is it," Gombrich asks, "that different ages and different nations have represented the visible world in such different

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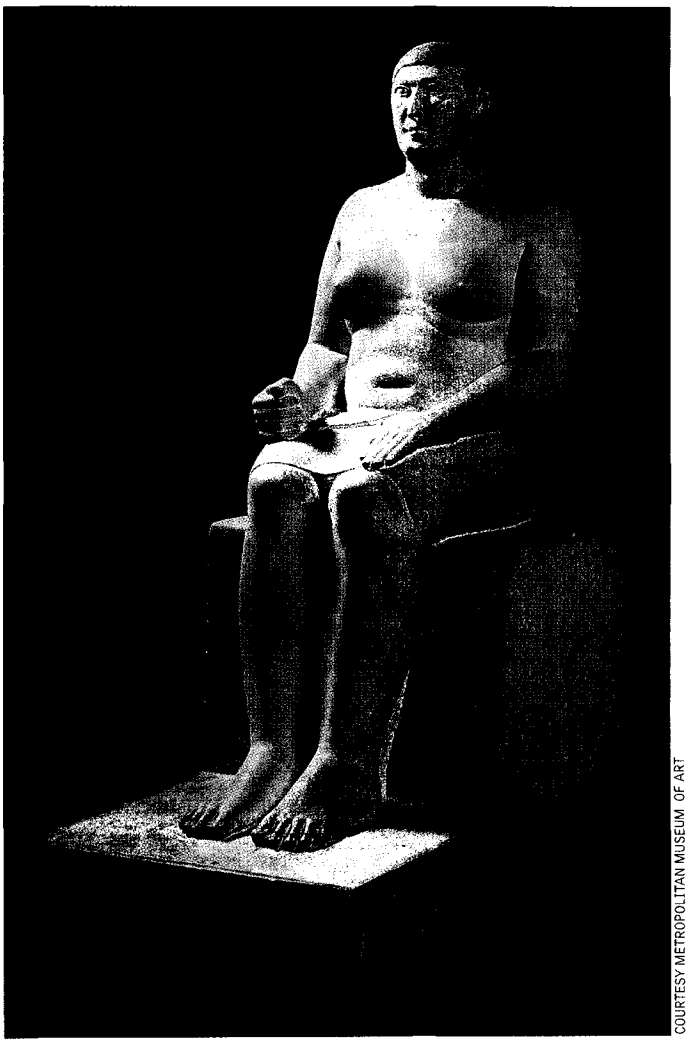
ways?" Do people observe nature in different ways? And what relationship is there between what an artist sees and what he or she puts down? Those are precisely the questions that museumgoers found themselves asking again and again this season at the exhibitions of Egyptian art and at shows including astounding drawings by Schongauer, Dürer, Grünewald, and Watteau.

At "Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids," museumgoers encountered a system of conventions that is in some sense as rigid as any in the entire history of art. One might expect to find such a vision off-putting, yet at the Metropolitan many visitors seemed to feel, as I did, that they were witnessing a society in the very process of dreaming up a way of looking at the world. (The exhibition has also been seen in Paris and Toronto.) Spanning the Third to the Sixth Dynasties and half a millennium, roughly 2649 BCE to 2150 BCE, the show was huge; there is hardly an exhibition in the Metropolitan's history that has filled more space. The show might have been overwhelming, but the beautifully unfussy look of the individual galleries, and the powerful narrative that unfolded from gallery to gallery, made the whole vast experience feel available, comprehensible. Looking back on a season that has brought us not one but two inspired installations of Egyptian art at the Metropolitan—the dark-toned presentation of "Ancient Faces" this spring was equally deft—I find myself thinking, as I have more and more in recent years, that the Metropolitan is in the midst of an extraordinary period. Under Philippe de Montebello's stewardship, the museum has demonstrated, time and again, that when you set a very high standard the public will be right there with you.

In Old Kingdom art each person, animal, and plant has its appointed place. This work is methodical, materialistic, factual. Viewers may find something off-putting about such a rigidly plotted universe, but the rigidity can also feel strangely—and even comfortingly—familiar; for we, too, know this desire to number and to name and to situate each thing. We are aware of the appeal of systematization, though we are also aware of the dangers. A look at the superbly carved reliefs representing life in and around the palaces and the temples of ancient Egypt can remind us of a whole range of images from the first half of the twentieth century in which men and women become part of some grand, overarching design that delights them or bewilders them. I am thinking of Chaplin amid the elephantine machinery of *Modern Times*; of the dark, almost silhouetted figures in Léger's *City* (1919); of the rows of pictograph figures in the charts that the legendary Dutch graphic artist Gerd Arntz made for the Viennese sociologist Otto Neurath's *Modern Man in the Making* (1940); of the stick figures in Klee's paintings of the 1930s, where the casually inscribed limbs, at once roughhewn and weightless, have a tragic dimension.



COURTESY METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

"Hemiunu Seated," Fourth Dynasty

Since the Egyptians left no treatises on art, we can only speculate as to how or why they arrived at a set of conventions that lasted for some 2500 years. Still, reasonable guesses are not difficult to make. Erwin Panofsky, in his book, *Tomb Sculpture*, relates the static character of Egyptian art to its funerary function, and observes that these are not representations "of a living being—body plus soul, the former animated by the latter—but a reconstruction of the body alone, waiting for animation." In painting and in relief, the figure is represented in a way that appears to faciliate a kind of conceptual clarity. The center of the figure, from shoulders through pelvis, is frontal—absolutely clear. Arms, legs, and head are in profile, which serves to emphasize the figure's potential for interaction with people and objects to left and right. In free-standing sculpture, the emphasis is on a face-forward power. Panofsky observes that, in general, Egyptian art "tends to show movement *in potentia* and not *in actu*." Material space, he argues, "is not as yet activated by time." Weight is distributed equally on the feet. Everything seems to refer to the primary block of stone, as if the figure had that kind of stability. Bending, leaning, relaxing is rare in the sculpture; the figure is alert, controlled, controlling.

There is no question but that the strict conventions of Old Kingdom art register as a form of repression; but the drama here is one of repression and release. Many if not most of this work may have been designed to be sealed away in tombs—and therefore not exactly intended to hold the eye. Yet especially in the sculpture of the Fourth Dynasty (roughly 2575 BCE to 2465 BCE) there is an intricate sensitivity, a feeling for the tautness of skin over muscle and bone, a sense of the tension and relaxation of joints, a refinement in the articulation of postures and facial features, a lovingness in the depictions of plants and animals. Looking at Fourth Dynasty masterworks such as the seated figure of Hemiunu or the double portrait of *King Menkaure and a Queen*, I am reminded of the kind of certainty that you find in Greek sculpture around 400 BCE or Netherlandish painting in the time of Van Eyck. The contours and volumes in these Fourth Dynasty sculptures are realized with preternatural clarity, and this suggests a kind of magisterial optimism, a belief that unruly human emotions can be explained.

The artists, who often work with types of stone that have a smooth, closed surface, know how to give their figures a slowly developing, inside-to-outside power that

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recalls the columnar, rising forms of plants and trees. Knees may not bend in the standing figures, but the long line of the leg, with its broad and lucid articulation, has a hidden, springing elasticity. The bone structure of King Menkaure and his consort can stop you in your tracks; the planes of their faces are crisp yet sensuous. The elegant perfection of craft—the ultra-clear definition in the shapes of eyes and ears—suggests watchfulness, so that the smallest elements take on a startling power.

In the figures of *King Menkaure and a Queen*, the distanced, hieratic aura of a royal couple is complicated by the hands of the queen, which, rather than hanging at her sides, touch the king, one resting on his left arm, the other on his stomach. These gestures are minimal, and yet we might be witnessing the beginning of love. And if there were any doubt that these are men and women who have eyes that see, we need only look at the magnificent knife-edge particularity in the carvings of reliefs of clusters of papyrus plants or birds in flight. The proliferation of sharply chiselled details can make you feel giddy, as if the artists were getting drunk on nature forms, but there is also a touchingly saint-like doggedness to these awesome renderings which brings to mind the precision with which Dürer sometimes rendered each leaf and blade of grass.

While "Age of the Pyramids" was a tremendous show from end to end, the high points were fewer in the later galleries, as the forms that had been discoveries in the Fourth Dynasty became tried and true methods. The conventions lost their freshness; their impact was muffled. Yet there were astonishing things all the way through, and toward the end of the show a new kind of delicate muscularity, unlike anything we have seen before, appeared in two Sixth Dynasty statues of Meryre-Ha-Ishetef, a slim man with powerful legs and broad shoulders. In these sculptures—one of the priestly official as a young man is done in ebony; the other, from later in his life, is in cedar—the artist seems to be pulling the taut drama of the body out of the very grain of the wood. There is a liquidity to the sleek complexity of the silhouette here. Without overarticulating the forms, the sculptors manage to give an unforgettable sense of the strength of this man's back, the long line of the spine, the wing-like force of the shoulders.

These ascetic yet powerful figures cannot but bring Giacometti's striding men to mind. Something in the elegant gravity of these Sixth Dynasty figures dissolve time, to reappear in Giacometti's Paris studio. Even when Egyptian sculpture achieves a sense of physicality that suggests erotic possibility—and surely that is the case here—the Egyptians reject any hint of playfulness; and Giacometti, after his years as a Surrealist, rejected play, too. He is the most sobering of great modern artists—sobering even as the gorgeousness of his forms leaves us happy. His standing figures are as intense and as single-minded as the ones that the Egyptians carved to seal away in their tombs.

SOME YEARS AGO, when I taught art history surveys at a New York art school, I came to dread the sessions when, after spending a couple of weeks on the art of a particular period or place, the time came to move on. When you are really caught up in the art of one period—in, say, Old Kingdom Egypt—it becomes the truth. You will discover correspondences and echoes—to Giacometti, for example. But when the focus shifts to a different time in Egyptian art or to a different civilization entirely, you see all the norms that you have come to love crumbling before your eyes. For a time teacher and students alike may rebel against new norms. We don't want to renounce an old love, even if we find a new love. After lingering over Greek sculpture of the late Fifth Century BCE, Hellenistic work can be a shock; but once the wonderful excess of Hellenism is accepted, it may take a

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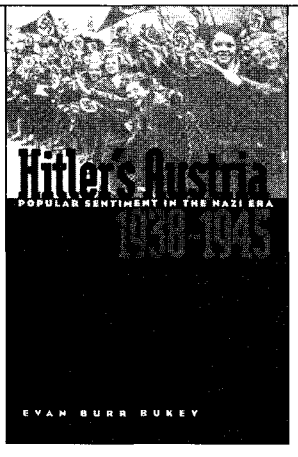

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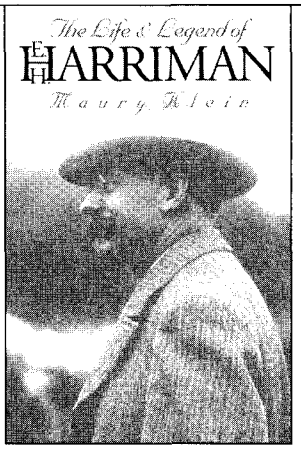

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while to acclimate to the later, splendiferous severity of Byzantium.

Is someone who has responded wholeheartedly to the cool realism of *Hemiunu Seated* or the gracious formality of *King Menkaure and a Queen* in any position to grasp the almost rococo narrative elaboration of the reliefs of royal family life done more than a thousand years later, during Akhenaten's reign? It is possible, but it may necessitate tapping into another side of your imagination: the part where you store bizarre intricacies and crazy surprises. "Age of the Pyramids" covered some five hundred years, but "Pharaohs of the Sun" covered only a couple of decades. Akhenaten rejected the polytheism of the priests of Thebes in favor of Aten, the god of the sun. This development has suggested to many, including Freud, the beginning of monotheism, but it also seems to have provoked a new kind of cult of the king. And the fascination of the art of Akhenaten's period rests in the way it personalizes the man and his life, representing Akhenaten as he probably actually looked, with elongated face, thick lips, broad hips and skinny legs, and by evoking palace life with a new attention to intimate gestures and a more generally idiosyncratic and fluid kind of movement.

Anti-Psalm

Where not so much as dreams of light may shine,
Nor any thought of greenness, leaf or bark.

Big transit of clouds, small transit of birds through the garden.
Beside the neolithic stones a post transporting electricity.
Then turn that last corner, and there it is again, a sea of light, luctual.
And still the world looking back, speaking in tongues,
and a few big windows open in the grass there, under my eyes,
outside the window. Windshaken
inside a local corner of the weather, reading psalms. Sunday morning:
no coffee, no oranges, only a fry of rashers, eggs, sausages,
and the broken coastlights weathersmacked. I might be standing yet
outside the empty phone-box, sound of my heart in my mouth
making a steady racket, balking again from this *shiver of nearness*,
the warm of one cheek against the warm of another.
Constant this turning away: from the withered hand,
the eyebrows of malice, the widow's morning sickness,
with the pure ache called *daughter* on the tip of my tongue.
But elsewise: quick curl of smoke, a breath, and at my bare feet
in the dust a little pile of words, feathers that rise and fly
at the next breath a century or so later.

Eamon Grennan

I SAW "PHARAOHS of the Sun" both in Boston and in Los Angeles, and in neither place did the exhibition seem entirely successful. (The show is in Chicago this summer and in Leiden next winter.) Significant objects were probably unavailable for loan, such as the legendary head of Nefertiti in Berlin or Tutankhamen's gold throne, with its fascinating relief of the king and queen in conversation. Akhenaten ruled for only seventeen years, after which his city, which is now known as Amarna, was abandoned, Thebes was capital once more, and polytheism returned. Much about this period remains enigmatic. To what extent were the changes politically motivated, a royal revolt against the power of the priestly class? What is the relation of Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti, a woman from outside the nobility who became a powerful figure in the Eighteenth Dynasty? As historical drama with mythic overtones, Akhenaten's radical break with the priests of Thebes is a tough subject for a blockbuster show. Too much complex historical material is packed into too brief a period; too many questions are unanswered, and probably unanswerable.

When Naguib Mahfouz published his novel *Akhenaten, Dweller in Truth* in 1985 (Anchor has just brought it out in the United States), he related the story indirectly, through a series of fourteen independent narratives that a young man elicits from the careworn survivors years after the supremacy of Thebes has been restored. These recollections suggest that Akhenaten was a visionary who knew how to communicate with his people but overestimated his ability to keep the priests at bay, or maybe didn't care. I wish that the organizers of "Pharaohs of the Sun" had taken a a few cues from the Egyptian writer, abandoned their attempts to tell the history straight, and chosen instead to present an accretion of fragments, of hints, of clues. The evidence of Akhenaten's reign is too shattered to yield a complete story, so that what held a museumgoer in "Pharaohs of the Sun" was striking bits and pieces. There were several beautiful heads of Nefertiti and other royal women: a Jasper fragment, little more than a pair of lips, from the Metropolitan; and the small wooden head of Queen Tiye, Akhenaten's mother, an aging beauty, with the skin around her eyes and mouth all tightly pulled from the years of harrowing palace intrigue.

The most fascinating object in the show was a stela of the royal family that reveals Akhenaten and Nefertiti at ease, playing with their young daughters. Here, perhaps as never before in the history of art, we see courtly life as a theater of domesticity. Akhenaten, his right hand cupping his daughter Mertaten's behind, his left one touching her head, gives her a kiss, as she reaches for his chin. The Old Kingdom synthesis of frontal and profile views remains, but there is a quickening of lively action and reaction. Under the impact of the flooding sunlight that is at the core of the short-lived new religion, private tenderness goes public.

Perhaps because Akhenaten is such an odd-looking fellow, with his thick lips, bulging belly, and skimpy legs, our sense of eavesdropping on a very specific moment is heightened. We feel as if we are seeing secrets exposed. We may feel almost embarrassed. One can understand why Mahfouz suggests that Akhenaten himself might have been a sculptor: this vision seems that personal. These intimate scenes are presented frankly. There is none of the distancing complication of a moral attitude, as there will be in nineteenth-century visions of the happy family. Akhenaten and his family are simply living in the presence of Aten, who sends out his brilliant light in the form of rays that end in tiny hands.

The relief of Akhenaten and his family leaves us wondering about the relationship between what an artist sees and what he represents. In a period of several decades in ancient Egypt, a radically informal dramatic style appears and disappears. Are we supposed to assume that earlier and later artists recognized the visual power of intimate gestures but were under orders not to represent them? And were those orders actually verbalized? Some of the casualness with which Akhenaten's family is treated crops up in earlier periods, but only in the depiction of fig-

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ures of lesser rank or no rank at all.

The idea that the lower classes ought to be represented in a more naturalistic style recurs in the history of art. In some late-medieval manuscript illustrations, for example, the aristocrats are rather stylized, while the peasants are observed more directly, with a more empirical sense of perspective and foreshortening. The same was true in Old Kingdom Egypt, where many of the most startling, directly observed images are of self-made men, of advisers to the king. Nature's quirks and surprises and idiosyncracies are irreconcilable with the grandeur of the royal family. Who was an artist to directly observe a king? Until, that is, Akhenaten ordered his chief sculptor—whose name, Bek, we happen to know—to do just that.

SOMETIME IN THE late eighteenth century or the early nineteenth century—the very years when the art of ancient Egypt was beginning to pervade the European consciousness—the old sense of the history of art as a single linear development began to be replaced by the idea that different periods have their own unique qualities, which need not necessarily be reconciled with one another. The new view developed only gradually, but by now artists take it for granted that a style is a matter of choice. And at a time when the stylistic possibilities open to painters and sculptors can seem bewildering, an artist's capacity to grapple with the fundamentals may be the one thing that can really set him or her apart.

The question of where an artist begins may be even more important than the question of where an artist ends up—which brings us back to Gombrich and his Egyptian drawing class. To examine a drawing is to be present at the creation, and that was the appeal of "From Schongauer to Holbein," the huge show of drawings from the museums in Berlin and Basel that brought four Schongauers, more than thirty Dürers (virtually a show within a show), eight Grünewalds (a good percentage of his extant product as a draftsman), some dozen Altdorfers and much, much more to the National Gallery in the fall. Artists were wild about this show, and they were not the only ones.

In this astonishing exhibition we were taken behind the immaculately finished surfaces of the German Renaissance painters and could begin to see how forms were actually constructed. Sometimes we had the impression that we were seeing this process stroke by stroke. In Dürer's *Portrait of an Architect* (1506), a middle-aged man's delicately angled features seem to be woven into the fine blue paper with a latticework of black and white watercolor. The architect's cheekbone feels almost chiseled out of slightly curved, overlapping marks. Dürer finds rhythmic affinities between cheekbone and eye socket, between the somewhat tense set of the mouth and the twirling wisps of the architect's longish hair.

Dürer is always circling between the particular and the general, the perceptual and the conceptual; and his technique is completely exposed here. What we see is a play of possibilities, knit into the tiniest filaments of the image, so that there is an imaginative aliveness to every eighth-of-an-inch of Dürer's drawing. Leonardo da Vinci may be the only other artist who has managed to pack so many discrete decisions into a piece of paper. The result is a mysteriously miniaturized vastness, and forms with a weight and a density that defies their literal dimensions.

Great drawings, which take us deep into an artist's working process, can have a nervewracking intensity. They make us believe that we are on the brink of discovering answers, and then the answer as often as not turns out to be another sort of question. Still, there were moments in the German show when I really felt as if I were getting to the bottom of things, and this was never truer than when I was standing in front of Grünewald's *Crying Head* (c. 1520). Grünewald is one of a tiny group of artists—Bosch and Callot come to mind—who know how to give weirdness a flowing, organic beauty.

In the *Crying Head*, Grünewald has asked his model to take on a crazily exaggerated pose—head thrown back, mouth open wide—and then has set out to make visual coherence of this radically distorted physiognomy. The surprise of this and other Grünewald drawings is in how gently and almost lyrically the artist goes to work with his black chalk. Grünewald's approach to the wrenched features of this crying face is calmly analytical. There is something strangely mild about the caressing softness of the chalk, as he gives us the oddly compressed shapes of the eye, ear, and nose that surround that thrust-back neck and vast, gaping mouth. The drawing is not a cry; it is a sensitive man's reflection on what it looks like when somebody cries. This disinterested expressionism has its own kind of power, because the artist's emotions do not block our access to the subject.

GRÜNEWALD'S *CRYING HEAD* is a textbook demonstration of the naturalistic basis of hyperbolic expression. But the more you look at Old Master drawings, the clearer it becomes that there is no one thing that we can point to and say, "This is naturalism." Few

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artists have as deep a feeling for caught-on-the-quick poses and at-an-angle perspectives as Watteau, but his naturalism has less to do with establishing a primal state than with inventing a supremely civilized dream. In the more than three dozen drawings by Watteau that were brought together last fall in a single room for "Watteau and His World," at the Frick Collection (the show then travelled to Ottawa), literalism takes on a glinting, ephemeral power. The hundreds of studies that Watteau did of men and women became a kind of impromptu pattern book, which he depended on when he devised his paintings.

Unlike the artists of earlier generations, who by and large seem to have first plotted the positions of the figures in their paintings and then worked up drawings of those particular men and women, Watteau's tended to knit together—almost collaged—his compositions out of studies that are straight from the sketchbooks. In the paintings, the result is a new kind of compositional intricacy. While Watteau has no rival when it comes to creating a shimmeringly elegant crowd scene, his individuals have a stand-alone complexity, a unique dramatic credibility and value.

Watteau's years—the first and second decades of the eighteenth century—were a time when the sky-high elegant manners of Versailles were going through a complicated loosening process in Paris. A sense of self that had been shaped by the theatricality of the royal court was giving way to a world in which elegant behavior was second nature. And so Watteau's drawings are about the invention of informality. When he draws hands from every imaginable vantage point, or, over and over again, a woman seen from behind, he is rebelling against every idea of fixed order, of logical hierarchy—against the idea that had begun all those centuries earlier, in the art of Old Kingdom Egypt. There can be an almost oriental aplomb to the impressions of women who seem to have set themselves down on the bare floor, as if they were living in one of the palaces that we glimpse in classical Japanese painting.

Watteau's studies, often more than one to a page, have a pell-mell beauty. He gives the illusion that he can handle his sticks of black, red, and white chalk almost simultaneously, like a pianist who creates the illusion of having three hands. This famous technique—it is known as *trois crayons*—yields sheets that are blissfully animated. The build-up of quick jabs and delicate thrusts of chalk gives a sensuous complexity to his sitters, who seem like a marvelous, loose-knit group of friends and acquaintances—hired models, but also aristocrats, intellectuals, business associates, musicians, and theater people. In his oh-so-unplanned way, Watteau's hundreds of drawings comprise a study of early-eighteenth-century manners that has an epochal grandeur. He describes a new, cool erotic climate. His women, fine-boned and often more than a little child-like, have a silky, steely independence. Behind the immaculate surfaces, you feel the upset of a world in which hardly anybody knows what to do with their feelings.

In one of the most magnificent sheets that was included at the Frick, Watteau arranges, on a single page, a woman seated with her back to us, together with eleven individual studies of hands, some male, some female, several holding a fan. He rejects the old convention of the sheet of paper as suggesting a single moment in time, or a box of air, or a perspectival space. For Watteau, the page can be a series of moments that unfold like a painted fan, with each figure or figure fragment suggesting a different time, maybe even a different place. The idea of the edges of the sheet of paper as delimiting a coherent time and space is, if not exactly exploded, then certainly loosened, shaken up.

In a remarkable new book, *Art, Dance, and the Body in French Culture of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge), Sarah R. Cohen offers some fascinating glimpses into Watteau's sense of the possibilities of drawing. Cohen begins by examining the cult of the "artful body" in the court of Louis XIV. She sees the figures and the groupings of figures in Watteau's paintings as related to this obsession with physical elegance, and to its manifestations in the theatrical conventions and the dance styles of late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century France. The beautifully engraved pages of diagrams of dance steps that Cohen reproduces suggest new sources for Watteau's thinking as a draftsman. Cohen is mostly interested in what these diagrams tell us about the way that the figures in the paintings were moving, but she is also attuned to the possibility that diagrams as abstract patterns—as arches and whirls and zig-zags inscribed on a page—can generate a new kind of pictorial sense.

One of Cohen's most telling juxtapositions is of a famous drawing of a man helping a woman to her feet and a diagram from Rameau's *Le Maître à danser*, published four years after Watteau's death. The zig-zagging lines of the dancer's steps in the diagram have the same thrust-and-counter-thrust as the pulling-together-and-pulling-apart couple in Watteau's drawing. Watteau is simultaneously thinking about figures moving through space and lines moving across the plane of the page. That Watteau could not have known this diagram is not important; he inhabited the same world as Rameau, and the technique that his contemporaries used to chart dance arabesques would have been familiar to him.

For Watteau, drawing might be said to be a way of dancing on the page. Watteau's interest in presenting a hand isolated from a body denaturalizes the figure, but he also knows how to re-naturalize the fragment on the page, where line itself is the essential life-giving force. He is one of the very first artists in whose work we find that an exact study of nature is, paradoxically, moving toward abstraction. He extricates the dancer from the dance, and the result is lines choreographed on the page. This is the beginning of a development that, two hundred years later, will culminate in the journey of a line that Klee describes in his "Creative Credo," where the line is an intrepid explorer, the one and only, the thing from which you can make anything.

The twinning of clarification and dissolution in Watteau's drawings and paintings inaugurates a theme that finds inspired variations in the tan-and-gray smoke-screens of Corot, the brazen painterliness of Manet, and Cézanne's hide-and-seek of edge and plane. And at least once, in Seurat's *Parade*, Egypt and Watteau are united: the frieze-like arrangement of Seurat's Parisian crowd, which is as grave as anything in an Old Kingdom relief, has a flickering violet-and-yellow aura that is straight out of the French master. A generation later, the divine equivocation that is Seurat's vision of Paris streets at dusk gives way to the crowded café tables of Picasso and Braque, on which the most delicate perceptions of edges and planes and shimmers of light dissolve into a world that no one has ever seen. At which point Picasso, Braque, and Matisse found themselves asking where nature had gone, and what it had meant to artists in the first place.

The modern movement was determined to get to the bottom of art. How little did it take to make a painting? Or a drawing? Perhaps it is not surprising that some of the key monuments in this search for the roots of art were found literally beneath the ground, in the cave paintings of Southern France and Northern Spain and in the burial sites of Egypt. In "Robot," one of his finest stories, Guy Davenport describes the discovery of the pre-historic cave paintings, and the appearance at Altamira of "a very large-eyed young Spaniard [who] came in on his hands and knees." This was Picasso, who (one of Davenport's characters remarks) "is a painter from the Reindeer Age." But if

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Picasso could be called a painter out of pre-history, Le Douanier Rousseau had already called him, during the period of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, a painter in the Egyptian style. Altamira and Thebes were two places to go to ask the question: Where did it all begin?

IN THE TWENTIETH century, it began to seem as if art might have as many beginnings as there were modern styles, and one possible beginning that meant a great deal to Picasso, Matisse, Derain, Giacometti, and many other artists was to be found in the scintillatingly straightforward realism of Greco-Roman portrait painting. We know this work from a large number of portraits that were buried with mummies in Egypt, and were discovered for the most part only in the 1880s. These portraits—which are all that remains of what the ancient writers tell us was the matchless panel painting of the classical world—created a sensation at the time of their discovery, and many of them were at the core of a magnificent exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum this spring, "Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt," which was first seen in 1997 in a somewhat different version at the British Museum.

In London the show was given a rather chaotic and overcrowded installation, but at the Metropolitan the rooms full of portraits were spectacularly laid out, so that the jewel-like richness of these works done in encaustic—a wax-based medium—came to the fore. Generally no more than a foot and a half high, these portraits give us the head, the neck, perhaps a bit of shoulder, and nothing much else. They are tightly focussed, yet the controlled painterly eloquence of the brushwork in the best of them achieves an emotional forthrightness that at times brings Velázquez and Rembrandt to mind.

These portraits are surrounded by questions. It is not clear if they were done while the subjects were alive or after their deaths. And since only a tiny amount of portrait painting survives from the rest of the Roman world, it is difficult to say what is particularly Egyptian about them. In most respects, they probably hold to a generally international Mediterranean style of the time. What astounds is the complete absence of strategy—an absence that is emphasized by the close-up format, which eliminates many of the elements of costume that could give them a period flavor. Painted straight-on, these men and women and children, with their huge, generally dark Semitic eyes, float right out of their century. They can seem to exist in the same time and space as the museumgoers who are regarding them. You feel that you are connecting with some of these people—deeply, immediately—in the way you connect with a friend.

COURTESY MERRELL HOLBERTON/THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS

Antoine Watteau, "A Seated Woman Turning to the Right," c. 1716–1717

These portraits are feats of painterly representation, but the virtuosity is without high jinks or flourishes. Not all of them are masterpieces. Some of them are mere journeyman stuff. But the greatest are transcendently workmanlike, and that is a category unto itself. These pictures were created at a time roughly equidistant between the masterpieces of Fourth Dynasty Egypt and the drawings of Watteau—a couple of centuries after King Menkaure accepted the pressure of his wife's hand and a couple of centuries before Watteau's women turned their backs on their lovers and collapsed into a daydream on the floor.

These Egyptian portraits have mesmerized artists since they were first discovered, and realists such as Meissonier and Menzel praised them. In Paris they fascinated Picasso, Matisse, and others; they were illustrated in important magazines, such as *Cahiers d'Art* and *Formes*; Albert Barnes discussed them in his book about Matisse; and Malraux wrote of them in *Twilight of the Absolute*. In the super-heated experimental atmosphere of early-twentieth-century Paris, where stylistic developments occurred with a speed that must have sometimes startled even the artists themselves, these Greco-Roman portraits had a fascinating austerity; their vogue comes out of the same moment when interest was turning to Pascal.

In the centuries since Watteau, artists have often become absorbed in such extremely personal themes that subject matter itself has been on the verge of vaporizing. The Egyptian mummy portraits offer the fascination of an art in which the artist is literally unknown, while the subject, an ordinary man or woman, is absolutely present—a presence as hard, clear, and objective as the rectangles in one of Mondrian's Neoplastic paintings. These mummy portraits are a kind of absolute realism; a realism without strategy. In a period of reckless stylistic confusions such as our own, the Greco-Roman portraits stand as perhaps the most styleless of all masterworks, which of course only carries us back to the riddle of style.

This season's exhibitions of Egyptian art and of Old Master drawings were terrific museum-going experiences; but if the fascination of the shows was obvious, they also had their awesome depths. Whether you were absorbed by the four-square lucidity of an Old Kingdom sculpture or the delicate arabesque in a drawing by Watteau, these are masterpieces in which structures are so perfectly resolved that it is possible to glimpse the patterns behind the particulars: not just the skin of a style, but its skeleton, too. In each of these great exhibitions something deep was exposed, but none of the surface pleasures were lost in the process. Style turns out to be less appearance than essence. In the very greatest art, superstructure and substructure have a way of looking very much the same. ■

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The other American faith.

Gambling for Grace

By JACKSON LEARS

I.

THE IMPULSE TO gamble is mysterious and powerful. Anyone who doubts it might consider a few scenes from the recent casino revival. In Connecticut, a couple leaves a nine-year-old boy in a car overnight in freezing weather while they gamble at Foxwoods Casino. In Mississippi, parents leave their twelve-year-old son in similar circumstances, with a revolver for protection. In Niagara Falls, casino operators complain that slot machine players are urinating into the plastic coin cups supplied by the casino or onto the floor beside the machines. Some wear adult diapers. All are reluctant to leave a machine that they are hoping will soon pay off. And in Louisiana, video poker players report trancelike out of body experiences, the feeling of "being sucked into oblivion."

What is going on? For many public moralists, the answer is simple. According to Walter Cronkite, who passes for a sage in this media-addled culture, the legalization of gambling means that "a nation once built on a work ethic embraces the belief that it's possible to get something for nothing." Similar anxieties have sparked nationwide campaigns against casinos, one led by a Methodist minister named Thomas Grey. He is also a Vietnam veteran and calls his recruits "Gideon's Army," and claims to be "fighting a battle for the soul of America."

This struggle is not uniquely American. In 1992, Chinese Communist officials in Shanghai unleashed a campaign against mah-jongg that included mass self-criticisms by 4,300 party members who had sworn off gambling, and the public burning of 400 mah-jongg sets, and the commissioning of 5000 anti-gambling squads. None of this stemmed the national obsession with the game. The conflict over gambling is part of a modern global war between revolutionary virtue and reactionary vice, a struggle that has surfaced whenever the righteous declare their intention to remake the licentious, to create a systematically disciplined "new man." As Michael Walzer observed a long time ago, there is a direct line from Cromwell to Lenin. And rectitudinous modernizers, whether Puritans or Communists, have never had much truck with gambling.

Still, the controversy over this particular vice has a peculiarly American resonance. The debate about gambling reveals fundamental fault lines in American character, sharp tensions between an impulse toward risk and a zeal for control. Those tensions may be universal, but seldom have they been so sharply at odds as in the modern United States, where longings for a lucky strike have been kept at bay (at least until recently) by a secularized Protestant ethic of steady accumulation.

Contrast that moral backdrop with the European *haut monde* evoked by Dostoevsky in *The Gambler*, in 1866. Dostoevsky's Roulettenberg is a society powered by feverish, erotic obsession—with money, status, romantic attachment. Whatever the object, what is crucial is the desire to be always in pursuit, on the edge, whether at the roulette tables or in a lady's chamber. The only constraints on this quest for intense experience are the remnants of a creaking caste tradition, a set of musty principles and rituals that can easily be counterfeited. In Roulettenberg, it is always an open question whether this marquis or that countess is the genuine article or not.

American society presents a radically different picture. The abolition of hereditary privilege created broader opportunities for counterfeiting profitable selves and pursuing feverish obsessions. Yet the very boundlessness of possibility demanded a stricter set of internal prohibitions. The exorcism of that pervasive spectre, the confidence man, required the invocation of a mythic alternative, the self-made man. As the apotheosis of plodding diligence, the cult of self-made manhood posed severe moral challenges to American gamblers.

FOR MORE THAN two centuries, our moral traditions and our secular cults of self-help have disdained gambling and denied chance, arguing that "you make your own luck" and insisting on a solid link between merit and reward. William Safire echoes generations of clerical moralists in his bitter condemnations of legalized gambling. "The truth is that nothing is for nothing," he writes. "Hard work, talent, merit, will win you something. Reliance on luck, playing the sucker, will make you a loser all your life." In a competitive society, few apparitions are more terrifying than the spectre of "the loser"—the poor sap who never really grasps how to play the game.

But the rules of the game have never been etched in stone. For every defender of diligence there has been a devotee of chance. At least since Tocqueville compared American society to "a vast lottery," our mythology of business has celebrated risk-taking, knowing when to hold and when to fold, taking advantage of "the breaks." Especially in flush times, it has not always been easy to distinguish gambling from speculation or investment; even Horatio Alger knew that luck was as important as pluck in achieving success. The gambler, endlessly starting over with every hand of cards, has embodied the American metaphysic of re-inventing the self, of re-awakening possibilities from one moment to the next. The gambler and the entrepreneur have been twinned.

And yet it has been essential to tell them apart. For those who believed that the American economic system was part of a providential order, the respectable businessman could never be reduced to merely a fortunate gambler. Illicit gambling had to be distinguished from shrewd investing and successful entrepreneurship. Historically, Safire and other moralists have played a crucial role in legitimating market culture, explaining away random or rigged inequalities by incantatory references to hard work and just deserts.

DOUBLE DOWN: REFLECTIONS ON GAMBLING AND LOSS
by Frederick and Steven Barthelme
(Houghton Mifflin, 198 pp., $24)

CARD SHARPS AND BUCKET SHOPS: GAMBLING IN NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA
by Ann Fabian
(Doubleday, 493 pp., $35)

GAMBLING, GAME, AND PSYCHE
by Bettina Knapp
(State University of New York Press, 308 pp., $14.95)

IN NEVADA
by David Thomson
(Alfred A. Knopf, 330 pp., $27.50)

JACKSON LEARS teaches history at Rutgers University and is writing a book on chance and luck in American culture.

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For a while, at least, it looked as if the great bull market of recent years represented a fundamental challenge to this rhetorical tradition. The sorcerers of the dot-com economy temporarily severed stock prices from the ballast of company earnings, which used to be the measure of disciplined achievement over time. And by banishing that vestige of the Protestant ethic, they also helped to create new models of legitimate gambling. The best known of these socially acceptable high rollers are the day traders, sitting entranced at their computer consoles, dodging bullets, riding momentum, selling out just in time (they hope), and feeling drawn inexorably to the frisson of danger. The solitary, obsessive existence of these people bears a striking resemblance to the desperate, ecstatic life of the compulsive gambler.

Despite the recent "correction" to the inflated NASDAQ index, the descriptions of day trading remain largely untainted by the language of pathology. It is a risky business, economic pundits agree—but isn't it merely a distilled version of the game that we are all constantly being urged to play? When money seems magically to beget more money—or to make it disappear—with no more apparent reason than the arrangement of numbers on a screen, the hallowed distinction between gambling and investment becomes more difficult than ever to sustain. Economic life becomes a huge ritual of superstition.

All the more reason, then, to legitimate the new, on-line gamblers by stigmatizing the old, off-line gamblers, who anyway tend to be grayer, paunchier, and poorer than the young whippets of Wall Street and Silicon Valley. Stock trading may breed pathological or destructive behavior, but it is seldom subjected to the clinical gaze of psychiatry—and even more rarely, in recent years, to the baleful stare of moralists. Gambling, in contrast, remains vulnerable to dissection and disapproval (and over-simplification).

THOUGH ATTITUDES TOWARD gambling reveal complexities at the core of our culture, inquiry into its significance has remained largely within the censorious boundaries suggested by a headline in *The New York Times*: "Fervid Debate on Gambling: Disease or Moral Weakness?" This puritanism has long framed American discussion of personal habits that undermine the ethos of systematic self-control: cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, idiosyncratic sexual tastes. With respect to gambling, as with other guilty pleasures, we are offered a non-choice between moral idioms of disapproval and medical idioms of disapproval.

The problem with the castigation of gambling is not that it is mistaken—without question, compulsive gamblers have ruined legions of lives, not least their own—but that it is too narrowly circumscribed. By reducing gambling to a collection of psychiatric symptoms or a sign of political corruption, the critics have overlooked its wider web of connections to ancient, multifaceted cultural rituals that have addressed profound human needs and purposes. The debate about gambling is never just about gambling; it is about different ways of knowing, different ways of being in the world.

And so it may be worthwhile to approach gambling as part of a wider culture of chance—a culture more at ease with randomness and irrationality, more doubtful that diligence is the only path to success, than our dominant culture of control. The culture of chance has its own rituals, beliefs, even gods (though they are largely unacknowledged ones). It encourages reverence for grace, luck, fortune—powers beyond human mastery whose favor may nonetheless be courted. The woman who consults a dream book to interpret her unconscious life (and learn what number to play) may be participating in an ancient tradition of divination. The man who buys a lottery ticket may be paying a hope-maintenance tax to Fortuna, a deity long discredited by the devotees of self-help. However futile, his gesture still loosens the keystone of the culture of control: our quasi-official faith (evangelical or managerial) in the human capacity to master fate. Apparently trivial games can become ways of raising ultimate questions—connecting numbers running and cosmology, gambling and grace.

What is sorely missing from the American debate is a sense, historical and spiritual, of this connection between gambling and grace. How could it not be? Urgent policy decisions regarding the prohibition of video poker or the provision of tax breaks for casino owners can hardly await the outcome of metaphysical speculation. But the larger questions are worth considering. They are certainly the more difficult questions. The notion of grace as a kind of spiritual luck, a free gift from God, lies at the heart of gambling's larger cultural significance.

The most profound meditations on grace, from Blaise Pascal to Jonathan Edwards and Paul Tillich, have all led toward a refusal of anxious striving, a recognition that the dream of mastery over fate was a delusion. In this tradition, a sense of grace could not be produced predictably or earned systematically (though schoolmen sought to formulate methods for accomplishing that); it could only be

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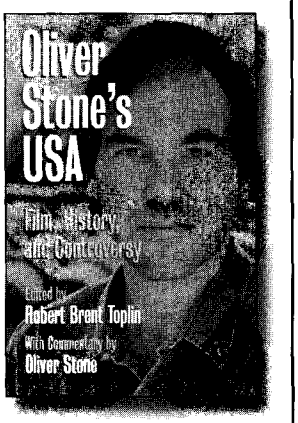

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courted obliquely and experienced fleetingly. It was a gift, or "something for nothing."

Outside the Christian tradition, moreover, grace could appear in many secular forms. It could serve as a term for that ever-elusive sense of oneness with the cosmos that athletes experience when they are "in the zone," and that artists experience when they are compelled by inspiration, or that gamblers experience when they are on a hot streak. If we are lucky, grace could be what happens when we take a chance; when we cease trying to control events and simply play.

The ethic of serious play—the old tradition of *homo ludens*—preserves a critical edge in our culture, despite its alarming resemblance to pop-psychological cant about the wisdom of "letting go." The key to its complexity is the constant possibility (and perhaps the ultimate certainty) of loss. For the gambler as for the believer, grace can be born of losing as well as winning. According to the fictional female gambler in Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*, there was always the chance that "one could experience that lovely, lightheaded feeling of loss, the knowledge that one had abandoned one more brick from the foundation of one's fortune, that one's purse was quite, quite empty ... and no matter what panic and remorse all this would produce on the morrow, one had in those moments of loss such an immense feeling of relief—there was no responsibility, no choice."

In a society such as ours, in which responsibility and choice are exalted, in which capital accumulation is a duty and cash a sacred substance, what could be more subversive than the readiness to reduce money to mere counters in a game? The gambler's willingness to throw it all away with merely a shrug of the shoulders could embody a challenge, implicit but powerful, to the modern utopian fantasy of the systematically productive life.

II.

SUCH SPECULATIONS MAY be a long stretch from the bleary-eyed slot players, pissing in their change cups. But as an array of new books suggests, once the subject of gambling is freed from the discourse of immorality or pathology, it can inspire useful imaginings.

Bettina Knapp's imagination, in *Gambling, Game, and Psyche*, is wide-ranging and eclectic, but also wedded to formula. Her quest for the larger meanings of gambling leads her through a remarkable variety of literary texts, from Pascal's *Pensées* and Poe's "William Wilson" to Kawabata's *The Master of Go* and Zhang Xinxin's *Orchid Madness*. Knapp remains attached to a Jungian framework, which is sometimes unfortunate but not altogether a bad thing. Despite his weakness for crypto-fascist cults of the irrational, Jung's quixotic efforts to document a collective unconscious led him to recognize the connections between games of chance and divinatory rituals, to see that gambling was not merely a neurotic self-punishment or substitute for masturbation (the orthodox Freudian dismissal), but also a way of seeking—and perhaps obliquely expressing—some fundamental knowledge about the universe.

This assumption opens Knapp's analysis up to myriad possibilities, from explicating the differences between Jansenism and Jesuitism to exploring the cosmic significance of a Japanese board game. Unfortunately, these explorations are mere crumbs dropped by the way. Few arguments are sustained or developed, as Knapp hurries from one text or bit of anthropological data to another, hobbled through much of her journey by a clumsy clinical idiom: "An efficacious escape mechanism for some, the activity [gambling] may catalyze a variety of latent and self-harming behavioral patterns and usher in a condition of denial, the player becoming oblivious to the reality principle." The Jungian framework both informs and imprisons Knapp's interpretations.

TO MOVE FROM the claustrophobic atmosphere of psychoanalytic literary criticism to the proverbial boundlessness of American cultural history ought surely to be a liberating step. As Ann Fabian demonstrates, however, the rhetoric of boundlessness is deeply misleading, even for the fluid and mobile society of the nineteenth-century United States. The most apparently marginal men, those free-wheeling professional gamblers, had to operate within a complicated and often contradictory code of norms.

Fabian's book is a series of finely crafted essays on a common theme: the difficulty of distinguishing between licit and illicit gambling in American market culture. She documents the pattern of self-purgation through allegorical projection: the speculative capitalist could legitimate his own enterprise by disowning his disreputable double, the gambler. Yet she also acknowledges that this strategy was more easily described than accomplished: "the split between virtuous speculation and vicious gambling could never be maintained with absolute precision: gambling contained too much of capitalist virtue to stand exalted as unalloyed vice." Endless risk, rapid gain (or loss), the tireless quest for accumulation: what capitalist could deny that the gambler's rhythms of life resembled his own?

FABIAN APPROACHES THIS theme at various oblique angles, illuminating a series of interesting characters. Their peripatetic careers suggest that the gambler's life could be a quintessentially American saga of self-transformation—perpetually imagined and plotted but only fitfully successful. One revealing figure was Robert Bailey, a poor boy from Maryland whose father was killed in the American Revolution and whose mother kept a tavern. With a good head for figures and a graceful style on the dance floor, Bailey decided to combine those skills into a career as a professional gambler and a *bon vivant*. But he never won the trust of the gentry; the gentleman's mask kept slipping to reveal the striving arriviste, professionalizing games that the planters played for pleasure. On the cusp of the antebellum market revolution, he remained suspended between aristocratic pretension and commercial aspiration.

Even amid the fluidity of an emerging market society, the possibilities for remaking the self were limited by deep cultural assumptions. Consider the career of Jonathan Green, a reformed gambler who sought to stem the contagion of wagering among urban merchants and their clerks. During the 1840s and '50s, Green joined the army of moralists who were busily exposing the evils of urban life. But his detailed descriptions of gamblers' tricks provoked suspicions that he was covertly teaching his audiences how to cheat at cards. And his emphasis on the ubiquity of economic self-interest seemed to deny the comforting middle-class faith in the home as a refuge from commercial calculation. Green's crusade against gambling ended in failure and embarrassment, with his New York audiences roaring with laughter at anecdotes intended to evoke outrage. Try as he might, Green could not re-fashion his identity successfully.

The one successful self-transformation recorded by Fabian involved the crossing of the color line: James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912), a fictional account of how and why his light-skinned narrator decided to pass for white. For Johnson, a black educator and civil rights activist, racial progress meant bidding farewell to familiar scenes of temptation—the juke joints and the low-down dives where poker games lasted for days and bartenders kept tattered linen dusters on hand for gamblers who had lost their shirts (and sometimes their pants as well). As Fabian suggests, Johnson charts his protagonist's movement from this black world of "caprice and

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passivity" to the white world of "rational action," or from gambling to investment.

FABIAN TRACES THE meandering path of anti-gambling sentiment from republican demands for revolutionary virtue to evangelical agendas for self-control. Gambling was never "irrational" enough to excite the popular horror provoked by drunkenness and lechery. The gamblers in Green's cautionary tales, as Fabian observes, were "exposed not as wild irrational devotees of chance, but as consummately rational figures—the capitalist refigured as thief." This gambling stereotype would resurface in the Populists' assault on scheming commodities traders, indeed on all the "parasites" who preyed upon the virtuous "producers."

But this was not the whole story. When gambling was embedded in a broader culture of chance, it assumed a more challenging cultural significance. The emergence of policy ("the numbers game") among urban blacks and immigrants was a case in point. When policy players consulted dream books to decide which number to play, they aimed to transform sleep into capital: they "openly challenged the rational assumptions of the market economy." Embodying (in Fabian's view) the ideas of Georges Bataille, Marcel Mauss, and other critics of rationalist market models, policy players "interpreted, they did not calculate; and they insisted that waste, not accumulation, set life in motion. To bet on dreams and hunches against long odds was not simply a rational response to a closed economy, but was the means of opening the closed economy to the play of the imagination."

In its purest form, the worldview of the policy players was articulated by Harlem Pete, the author of a mid-twentieth-century dream book unearthed by Fabian. "If you want to be rich," wrote Harlem Pete, "Give! If you want to be poor, Grasp! If you want abundance, Scatter! If you want to be needy, Hoard!" Though Fabian does not say so, this sounds more like Jesus of Nazareth than Georges Bataille. The gambler's transvaluation of capitalist values takes us beyond academic theories to a certain subversive strain of Christianity, long kept in shadow by orthodox defenders of the faith—the strain that advises us to take no thought for the morrow and to lose all to gain all.

In citing Harlem Pete, as elsewhere, Fabian hovers on the edge of philosophical provocation, but she does not take the plunge. Who can entirely blame her? Those waters are murky, if not always deep. Her book is a fresh, imaginative foray into virtually uncharted territory; it seems a little churlish to chide her for its limitations. Still, there are times when she could have teased more interesting implications from her evidence. And her unwillingness to do so stems from her apparent assumption that "the market" is the best and maybe the only context in which to understand gambling's cultural significance. Fabian has skillfully underscored the importance of a shape-shifting figure—alternately stock trader, venture capitalist, and professional gambler—as an embodiment of the tension between calculation and risk at the core of modern commercial society. Yet there is more to the story. The subject of gambling offers larger returns on more diversified investments; many of the most rewarding speculations begin where market metaphors trail off.

CONSIDER THE MATTER of place—geographical landscapes as well as intellectual landscapes. Gambling has undoubtedly meant different things in Monte Carlo and in Macao; and it has derived a special significance from its American setting, too. The wilderness of boundless possibility, the allure of risky business on the cutting edge of empire, the ever-present prospect of starting over somewhere else—this cluster of images and ideas was a central part of American individualist mythology, well before Frederick Jackson Turner gave it scholarly sanction, in 1893, in his classic essay on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History."

Despite the drubbing that Turner has received (with good reason) from Western historians in recent years, when it comes to the history of gambling his individualist inferences still make some sense. Gambling flourished on the fringes of settled society, on rivers and railroads and other highways of commerce as well as in boom towns near gold mines and oil fields. In comparatively uncivilized frontier regions, gambling was a form of masculine self-testing, a highwire act without a net. (Female gamblers were few, and disreputable in frontier lore: their appetite for risk was vaguely threatening to men, and often sanitized by sentimentality.) Many icons of twentieth-century masculinity owe a sizable debt to the mythic character of the frontier gambler.

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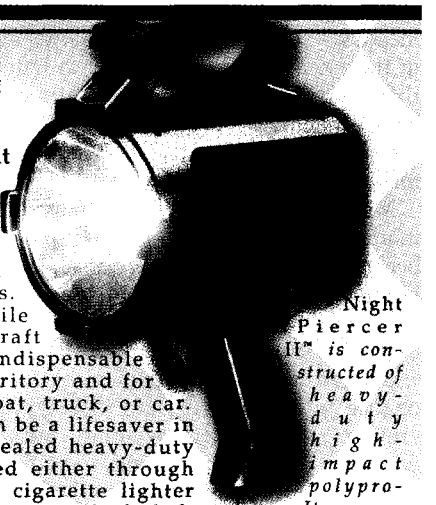

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need to get beyond television's inanities and relocate the frontier gambler amid the strangeness and the desolation of the landscape that he actually inhabited.

That is one of the many accomplishments of David Thomson's very fine book. Thomson is a shrewd observer and an elegant writer, and *In Nevada* is about far more than gambling. It tells many fascinating stories about that very weird state, deftly revealing the ways it both resists and embodies major tendencies in the dominant American culture. Thomson's book is quickened by his sharp awareness of the centrality of the physical landscape: the endless alternation of basin and range—vast flats of emptiness set off, at the horizon, by jagged peaks of gray, purple, slate, mauve, and another color that one might call "grass, khaki, gold, or dun" but that is most like "the color of a lion's skin." It only appears at the end of the day, and only (in Thomson's experience) in Nevada.

Those extraordinary vistas help to create Nevadans' fascination with "somewhere over there": the eternal promise of the interior, just through the next pass, beyond the next plain. It is the land's invitation to take risks, and Nevadans historically have accepted it. Sometimes the results were disastrous. In 1846, the Donner Party lingered too long in the rich meadows, watching the first snows fall in the mountains but "thinking to fatten their cattle and gather their own strength before making the big play." Some died as a result; like unsuccessful gamblers, they made a good bet at a bad time.

More commonly, risk was an individual matter. Though Nevada's mines mostly became giant corporate enterprises, many originated in one man's hunch. That archetypal American figure, the "prospector," is a particular instance of a common childhood dream, one with particular resonance in Nevada: the kid kicking the ground, seeing something shiny, leaning down to pick it up, seeing something more. The prospector "is a loner," Thomson writes; "even if he seems to be with others, he cannot. For it is not just that they might talk too much, too soon, and give it all away. Far more, it is that true hunches have to be conceived, developed, and protected in solitude. Groups cannot gamble—with groups, the whole thing becomes a stock market. When individuals gamble, they put themselves against the weight of others, and of history. They also mean to redesign the future."

In Nevada, outdoor and indoor landscapes reinforce this privatization of risk. Outdoor emptiness breeds "an ingrowing solitude, not tranquil or nourishing, but the walking separateness that almost guarantees there is no society." Yet this feeling is not simply a product of wide-open spaces. According to Thomson, "You can see the same mood sometimes, macabre and haunting, on the packed casino floors of Vegas, where every player is alone with his or her chips and the script that Fate is working on." Most journalistic commentary on Las Vegas is banal, a lot of predictable inside dope; but Thomson somehow manages to restore some clarity to such overexposed tough guys as Frank Sinatra and Bugsy Siegel. More interesting still are his biographical portraits of figures like George Wingfield, a sometime saloon-keeper and successful mineowner who was not only the most powerful man in Nevada (for a few years after the turn of the century), but also a hell of a poker player. This required "a certain cold scrutiny of weakness in others," especially the miners who kept "putting their courage, their gambling instinct, up against the house and respectable society."

The gambler against the house: it is a familiar masculine stance, an easily satirized celebration of the stoic isolato. Yet Thomson recognizes the struggle's genuine appeal: "plodding advancement is not for the transcendent," he writes, "or for anyone who is "looking for the big break—which means 'break,' not just as opportunity or stroke of fortune, nor even as 'breakout,' as in the sense of making an escape, but 'to break,' as in severing the previously known laws of continuity, logic, physics, and evidence." The search for rents in the seamless garment of everyday rationality suggests that gambling could sometimes amount to nothing less than a vernacular philosophy.

It could also be an effort to liberate money from its ridiculously inflated importance as an indicator of fundamental value. "Great gamblers have seen the grim absurdities in capital and its accumulation," Thomson remarks. "They know money is merely a game (like 10,000 on the Dow) and they insist on being playful with it. There is ease and even transcendence in that feeling." Viewed from Thomson's point of regard, Las Vegas might lay claim to a more than metaphorically religious significance. The city is, he writes, "that rare thing: a city built in the spirit that knows its days are numbered. That's the eerie spirit of its profound casualness. The house itself knows that it is only there by the grace of God." An emphasis on the precariousness of wealth, the impermanence of life, and the arbitrariness of money as a measure of worth—if these are tenets of a gambler's worldview, it may be a perspective worth cultivating.

Certainly a religion of chance could constitute a legitimate response to the smug, secular version of Christian providentialism that has dominated American public discourse for two centuries. The hubris of that view lies in its tendency to sacralize the secular; in its glib assurance not merely that we are all part of a divine plan, but also that we can actually see that plan at work in prevailing social and economic arrangements, even in the outcomes of global power struggles. This faith has allowed the wealthy and the powerful to play God, or at least to claim to know His purposes. A more chastened (and realistic) perspective might grant a greater role to chance, if only as a counterpoint to the arrogance of ultimate explanation.

Thomson reflects on other forms of arrogance as well. His discussion of nuclear testing puts an ironic and disturbing twist on the philosophical conflict between providence and chance. The Nevada landscape itself, relentlessly inhospitable to human settlement, made the state "a providential testing place for our recklessness." But what happened when "we" were actually just a handful of government officials, secretly risking others lives, playing God? This was the operating procedure of the nuclear testing program in the 1950s, according to Thomson. "In Nevada," he writes, "the government launched a huge irreversible gamble with the fate of many people, without even telling the people that they were players." The Cold War atmosphere of crisis justified policies as risky and shortsighted as any gambler's. "Some gamblers sit at a table, enclosed in the cell of *now* and the next few seconds." Apparently, Thomson concludes, some governments do, too.

In Nevada is an uncommonly thoughtful combination of research, reporting, and speculation. It successfully locates the history of certain important American cultural values in a particular place. Without raising the properly exorcised spectre of environmental determinism, Thomson has provided a sustained meditation on the power of geography to shape aspirations and anxieties. And he has provocatively gestured to the link between gambling and grace.

III.

But the fullest exploration of that elusive connection can be found in the extraordinary story of two brothers from Mississippi, Frederick and Steven Barthelme. Their "reflections on gambling and loss" reveal how gambling is partly "about the money," but mostly not.

Double Down is a remarkable example of a familiar genre, the gambler's memoir. The plot resembles the cautionary tales

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for young men produced in the nineteenth century. Two brothers, both writers of fiction with tenured positions at the University of Southern Mississippi, begin to make late-night jaunts to the new casinos on the Gulf Coast. At first gambling is just a dash of excitement in lives that have come to seem too comfortable; but before they know it they are feeling drawn inexorably, night after night, to the slot machines and blackjack tables. They play for ever-higher stakes, win big, lose bigger. Soon it seems like nothing to drop $10,000 in a night. They squander a six-figure inheritance in a matter of months, and awaken to their folly only after they are falsely accused of conspiring with a dealer to defraud a casino. Eventually they are acquitted (though not until after the book is published), but the prospect of jail is sobering enough to shake them out of their compulsions. Or so it seems, at memoir's end.

Despite its structural similarities to conventional accounts, the Barthelmes' book is virtually unique among gamblers' memoirs in its combination of sharp perceptions and self-deprecating honesty, in its refusal to strike pathetic or heroic postures, in its sure-handed lightness of touch. In the recent literature of gambling, only the playwright Jack Richardson's *Memoir of a Gambler* (1979) rivals the Barthelmes' book in the subtlety and shrewdness of its speculations. Like the Barthelmes, Richardson realized that the gambler (or at least the one he knew best) was engaged in a theodicy—in an effort to glimpse some coherence in the cosmos. To the "old voices" in his head demanding that he justify his life as a gambler, Richardson replied: "I want to know.... I want finally to know.... Whether I am to have any grace in this life."

Yet the gambler's longings, for all their cosmic reach, are shaped by the homely details of private life. The Barthelmes were raised in Houston, in a literate, loving, and competitive family. Their parents were educated and articulate: the father was a prominent architect—acerbic, demanding, and dissatisfied; the mother was a teacher and reader, a would-be actress whose ambitions were constrained by the conventions of her time but whose playful imagination delighted and sustained her sons. Rick and Steve had an older sister and two older brothers, one of whom, Donald, was a brilliant writer of absurdist short fiction until his death from cancer at the early age of fifty-eight. In this rarefied atmosphere, the younger brothers write, "rationality was prized, but so was intensity. Feeling was admired and given broad authority, but any *display* of feeling tended to get mocked." So they tried to appear blasé while deploying wit and verbal dexterity to keep anxiety at bay.

Their lives mingled intellectual and spiritual dissatisfaction. Their father was always "editing" their house—rearranging, redesigning, knocking down walls and building new ones—so it seemed somehow natural that they should learn the skill of editing, itself a "school of dissatisfaction." Trained in restlessness, doubt, and non-conformity at home, the Barthelme boys were also sent to Catholic school, which (as they observe) "can accustom a soul to a high level of stimulation" and encourage impatience with too much comfort in later life.

By the time they had become ensconced at the university, the Barthelmes were nothing if not comfortable. About the stupefying pall of complacency that can settle over academic life, they are unsparing. Many of their colleagues "used to be better, before years of talking to students who were too easily impressed. It's an occupational hazard of teaching." Along with a middle-aged professoriat losing its intellectual edge, they encountered another familiar spectre (familiar, at least, to anyone who has spent much time in the academy): the conventional rebellion against conventionality. Irony, they complain, was the default setting of social intercourse; and every shred of idealism had to be concealed by it. Surrounded by careerists posing as radicals, the Barthelmes found themselves attracted to the apparently straightforward, uncomplicated lives of the people whom they met in the casinos.

THIS IS NOT the first time that intellectuals have recoiled from the pervasive phoniness of academic life—or more broadly, upper-middle-class professional life—to embrace the allegedly more intense, authentic experience of working-class or marginal subcultures. This desire, understandable as it may be, has always risked sentimental slumming on the one hand, sheer self-parody on the other. (One thinks of Norman Mailer hailing "the White Negro," the hipster whose determination to live in the moment made him an existential hero—which is to say, a publicity hound.) Yet the Barthelmes avoid these pitfalls, not least because they are so resolutely unheroic. They put an unpretentious spin on what has characteristically been a pretentious endeavor, the quest for authentic experience. That quest will continue, despite frequent descents into triviality, and frequent postmodern assaults on the very idea of authenticity. The fear that one is leading a vicarious existence, that one is somehow missing out on "real life," runs viscerally and deeply through the American body politic. It is not confined

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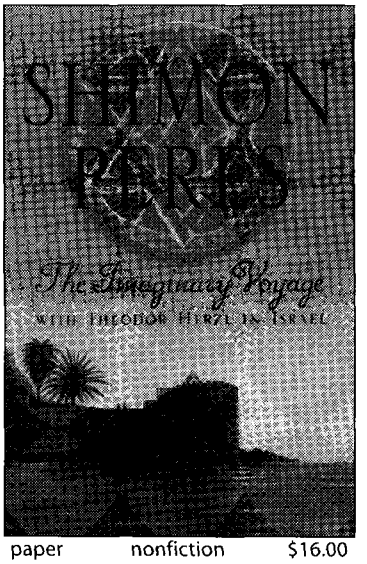

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to academics.

Yet tenured professors, more than most occupational groups, constitute an "out-of-harm's way subculture," as the Barthelmes admit. They knew about the world, they say, from watching it on television. They just weren't *in* it—"that was the point of being middle class, yes? Buy your way out of the threatening and immediate. The downside being that you lose some edge. In the world of kids or poor people or maniacs, there's always a lot of *stuff* happening, people doing crazy things, acting up, risking life, being desperately in love or terribly angry. There was always a lot of stimulation" in that world, "curiosity, recklessness, guilt." That was its appeal to two restless, dissatisfied, lapsed-Catholic men.

They are men, chronologically and biologically, but they sometimes refer to themselves as "boys." They never had children of their own; their family was always and only their family of origin; they remained powerfully attached to their parents. As they tell it, their descent into the vortex of truly crazed gambling does not begin until after their mother's death: "there was a new intensity to our play. . .—a feeling that we ought to be able to figure out a way to win, coupled with the knowledge that we probably weren't going to win and, added to that, that our gambling wasn't sensible, though sensible counted less now that Mother was dead." Within a year their father was dead too; he was a bully, she was a sweetheart, but together they had made life seem like "a lovely old-fashioned movie."

Now the movie was over. The Barthelme family no longer existed. The "boys" felt adrift and alone. Without children their family inheritance was merely an intolerable burden, something to be disposed of as quickly as possible—which they proceeded to do by finding another movie, at the blackjack tables. "It wasn't a good movie, but it was easy and quick, full of drama and jargon and icons—chips, tokes, and hundred-dollar bills—and fear, exhilaration, pressure."

To the Barthelme brothers, the loss of their parents somehow justified the loss of their money. There are all sorts of psychoanalytic formulas to explain this process; and the Barthelmes acknowledge their partial validity, and their ultimate inadequacy. Their father was an uncertain but obsessive investor. In their childhood home, "money was a being, a spiritual presence." The patriarch esteemed money, and granted it "the power to beat him to a pulp," while he kept coming back for more. "What we were doing would drive the old man crazy, and we knew it." Their posthumous rebellion against the paternal superego was also an effort to exact revenge against money, the big shot that had brought the old man to heel. The brothers' impulse to gamble, which was rooted in idiosyncratic family circumstances, acquired broader meanings as they reflected on what they were doing—driving night after night through the Mississippi dark to "a place where everything is different."

WHAT WAS DIFFERENT about the casino? It was a world of signs and portents, where magical thinking flourished and the most trivial chance events could be suffused with potential meaning. More important: the casino was an arena of liberation from the humiliations and the hypocrisies required by a utilitarian society. The dominant culture assumed that financial rewards matched personal merits, that money was an accurate measure of "net worth." Yet the people in the casinos knew better. They lacked the pretensions and the illusions that seemed so necessary to the world outside. And in contrast to the Las Vegas gamblers glimpsed by Thomson, they constituted more than a crowd of isolated atoms. "We liked thinking of our fellow gamblers as a team, liked treating money—that bully—as if it were so many slim-jim paper towels, liked the fact that people don't lie much while gambling," the brothers recall. (Bluffing, presumably, is part of playing the game, and ethically distinct from lying.) "A community of vice," they write, "makes hypocrisy unnecessary."

A big win by anyone brought the whole community together. It was "a victory over money, the tyrant that has been pushing you around your whole life," but it was also something more. As the Barthelmes observe, "There is a perfect alignment or echo between our experience in gambling and our experience in the world, and it is in the big win ... that the echo is most apparent. All the disorder, illogic, injustice, and pointlessness that we have spent our ordinary days ignoring or denying, pretending to see the same world our fellow citizens insist on seeing, trying to go along to get along, trying not to think too much about the implications, all of it flows forth in this confirmation of pointlessness—by luck." Watching those funny little symbols fall into place, the ones that resemble turtles and that represent a thousand dollars each, the jackpot winner grasps more fully than any Sartrean the absurdity of life. "It's about beating *logic*," the Barthelmes observe. "It's about chance confirming everything you knew but could make no place for in your life."

In its illogicality and its unpredictability, the big win constitutes an experience of momentary perfection, of oceanic feeling. The Barthelmes imply as much when they ponder the popular reaction to a Vietnamese man hitting a Royal Flush on video poker. "The win was just two hundred and fifty dollars, but the money wasn't the point. The perfect thing had happened. The possibility of perfection was something our friends and colleagues at the university where we worked no longer believed in. They had grown up, become wise, accepted things as they were. But everybody in the casino believed. However crude, however dizzy, however self-deluded these people may have been, they knew how to hope, how to imagine life as something other than a dreary chore. They imagined that something wonderful might happen, something that could change their lives. This was their fool's secret, one they shared with drunks, artists, and children, all of whom they resembled." By confirming (however rarely) that "fool's secret," the casino could transcend its cheesy opulence and become a place of communion with the benevolence of the force or the law or the logic or the will that rules the cosmos.

ONE HAS TO be wary of such assertions, of course. We all also know better. From a pragmatic perspective, such faith is foolishness. The big win is often a cruel delusion. In the end, most gamblers are losers—indeed, they seem determined to be losers. According to the psychoanalytic tradition, the gambler's compulsion to lose is a ritual attempt to assuage unassuageable guilt. (See Freud on Dostoevsky.) The Barthelmes acknowledge this possibility, but they reject its reductionism. Still, they admit that losing has its appeal: it helps to satisfy their longings for intense experience. Losing is "dangerous and it burns in a way not readily available these days." Unable to experience a feeling of loss when their father dies, they court it at the tables—the adrenaline rush, the heat surging to the surface of the skull, and ultimately the sense of relief (mingled with dismay) as the old man's money melts away.

Yet the Barthelmes realize that the real attraction of gambling lies beyond the categories of success and failure. "Winning is better than losing, but neither one is the goal of gambling, which is *playing*. Losing never feels like the worst part of gambling. Quitting often does." This acknowledgement links the Barthelmes with Johan Huizinga and the other theorists of serious play, and recalls the casino players' resemblance to "drunks, artists, and children." As the brothers observe, "our fellow gamblers were serious, not like academics but in the furious way that children are serious, concentrating on play, oblivious,

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intense, yet at ease. Essentially, they came to the casino to be children.... Because money was involved, it was play with an extra edge, but it was still play, and they were still children."

The Barthelme brothers were still children too, or so they realized when their parents died. They had kept the illusion of the family alive long after they and their siblings had scattered, using it "as a last shield between ourselves and the sad vacancy of living." They had tried to sustain the feeling that apparently suffused their childhood, the sense that they were part of a "lovely old-fashioned movie"; but when their parents died the spell was broken. It was then that they realized that the core of that childhood grace was the "perfect love" they had for their parents, a love that could only become less perfect over time. It "may get smarter, wiser, greater," even fuller, but never any purer. "It doesn't move toward perfection, but away. Like everything else, as soon as you find it, you start losing it." These quasi-Wordsworthian reflections suggest some of the most important and elusive connections between gambling and loss. It may be that, for the Barthelmes, gambling was an endlessly repeated, inevitably failed quest to re-create the conditions of a lost perfection, a sense of grace, which by its nature is evanescent and unsustainable.

THE LONGING FOR grace is at the heart of the culture of chance. Gambling ritualizes this longing, and underwrites its unfashionable truth. By taking a chance, by giving up the drive for perfect mastery of fate, gamblers recognize what the contemporary prophets of progress so often forget—that the pursuit of happiness defies the attempts to organize it. Like aleatory artists and idiosyncratic believers, they implicitly acknowledge that Fortune is best courted obliquely rather than confronted directly, and that the willingness to experience chance creates the possibility of grace. This was what William James realized when he said that chance was a kind of gift, and "something on which we have no effective claim"; and that it challenged the Victorian ideal of a systematically controlled life, and opened portals of possibility undreamt of by utilitarian rationalists.

Now, nearly a century after James's death, the dream of systematic control is very much alive in America. It is being rewritten in the idioms of management and money-worship. Technophilia runs rampant. Even the old pseudo-Darwinian creed of inevitable progress, which James did so much to discredit, has resurfaced in the vogue of "evolutionary psychology." Despite the ubiquitous rhetoric of risk, technological and genetic determinisms proliferate, confusing freedom and fate, insisting that we are all choosing to do what we have to do anyway. Maybe this shallow utopianism provides ontological reassurance to investors floating in the ether of the New Economy. Maybe it provides comfort and certainty to people who cannot bear the inconclusiveness and the complexity of human affairs. Maybe it is just another transitional phase in the contemporary American culture, in which all is transitional. Who knows? New prophets—or more precisely, new anti-prophets—may arise to puncture the pretensions of their time, to cultivate chance as something more than a hot stock tip, to recall the wisdom of William James and Harlem Pete. We should be so lucky. ■

The Enigma of Denial

By CARYL PHILLIPS

Between Father and Son: Family Letters by V.S. Naipaul

(Knopf, 285 pp., $26)

Reading and Writing: A Personal Account by V.S. Naipaul

(New York Review Books, 64 pp., $16.95)

SIX YEARS AGO, the less acerbic tone of V.S. Naipaul's *A Way in the World* suggested that the writer was beginning to make peace with his homeland of Trinidad, a place that he had often vilified as one of the many "half-made societies" of the colonial world. The book was not quite affectionate, but it was certainly freighted with nostalgia. Suddenly Naipaul was displaying an interest in people other than himself—a most un-Naipaulean conceit.

Since the publication of that book, sadly, Naipaul appears to have rediscovered his antipathy towards people and ideas that are not in tune with his own. *Beyond Belief*, a report of his "Islamic excursions among converted peoples," which appeared in 1998, is just a dyspeptic reworking of *Among the Believers*, which was published in 1981, a book in which Naipaul seems incapable of restraining his loathing for the Islamic world and its people, and appears to regard a great number of Muslims as little more than "half-serf" and ahistorical "fundos" who are wedded to a triple heritage of veiling, whipping, and amputation. Like so many of Naipaul's travel narratives, *Beyond Belief* is a serious book that is undermined by the author's inability to hold his own prejudices in check. Whereas *A Way in the World* appears to have been written by a writer with his eyebrows arched, *Beyond Belief* is a retreat to the art of writing while curling one's lip.

The reappearance of Naipaul's tendency to belittle people and places is disappointing, as is his continued sponsorship of himself as a writer whose passage towards maturity was uniquely difficult. We are forever being encouraged to sympathize with poor Naipaul for having started so far back in the race. In an interview in an Indian publication in 1998, Naipaul quickly found his stride.

> My life was very hard, in 1955 the world was very hard for people like me. Can you imagine writing a book like *Miguel Street*? People wouldn't even want to look at it. Today people are interested in writing from India or other former colonies. But at that time it was not considered writing. It was a very hard thing to have written this material, to have copies made, to wonder about it being lost, and have that book with me in loose manuscript for four years, before it was published. It really upset me and it is still a great shadow over me.

CARYL PHILLIPS's new book, *The Atlantic Sound*, will be published by Knopf in October.

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More than four decades later, the entirely predictable problems of an ambitious young man hawking a manuscript around London still cast a "great shadow" over him. Why, exactly, was it "a very hard thing" to have written *Miguel Street*? And are we really expected to believe that "writing from India or other former colonies" was being ignored? Those were the years when George Lamming, C.L.R. James, Edgar Mittelholzer, Samuel Selvon, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, and many others were being published and praised.

Having tried to convince us of the existence of vague difficulties that plagued his early writing years ("the world was very hard for people like me"), Naipaul continues:

> It all seems very easy now. The books coming out one after another, but they were created by great anxiety, great suffering. I could have been given a much easier ride but I wasn't, because of the time. It was very hard for me to get a job, very hard for me to find a place to live, very hard for me to find my own voice. It was very hard for me to have done all that. Having written those books, to get them published, and then it was very hard to get them adequately reviewed.

What makes Naipaul's whining so distasteful is the implicit suggestion that these difficulties were visited upon him because he was tainted by a colonial past that he was duty-bound to rise above. Not only are we expected to believe that he—and he alone—suffered these hardships of discovering a job and finding somewhere to live and attracting the attention of a publisher, we are also to understand that he was miserably burdened by the unfortunate accident of the place and the date of his birth. He was cursed in not being born in Sloane Square or in Bloomsbury, but in a "dark" region populated by individuals unfit to dignify real literature; and so he had little choice but heroically to escape. As he remarked in *Vanity Fair* in 1987, "If you're from Trinidad you want to get away. You can't write if you're from the bush."

NAIPAUL'S NEW BOOK is a collection of letters to and from his father, from the crucial years of 1950 to 1954, when Naipaul left Trinidad, undertook his studies at Oxford, and attempted in earnest to make himself into a writer. Although *Between Father and Son* is being published under Naipaul's name, the volume was in fact assembled and scrupulously edited by Gillon Aitken, his long-time English agent. In characteristically blunt fashion, Naipaul has made it plain that he, the "author" and the holder of the copyright, has no intention of reading his book. One sympathizes with this decision: few of us would be keen to re-read the letters of our youth.

Upon opening the volume, one discovers nine chronologically arranged bundles of letters that are principally between V.S. Naipaul (known affectionately as Vido), and his father Seepersad Naipaul. There is, in addition, a substantial body of correspondence between the younger Naipaul and his older sister Kamla, who for the entire length of this book is studying at the Hindu University in Benares, India. In fact, the volume begins with three letters to Kamla, written during Naipaul's last year in Trinidad. Thereafter Naipaul writes a short letter to Sati, his younger sister, from New York, where he stops briefly en route to England. Eventually, in August 1950, he arrives in England, where he spends a few weeks in London before "going up" to Oxford in October. Thereafter the letters between Naipaul and his father, and between Naipaul and Kamla, continue unabated, as Naipaul studies for his degree in English Literature and Language at University College, Oxford.

VIDIADHAR SURAJPRASAD Naipaul was born on August 13, 1932, in the small market town of Chaguanas in Trinidad. Naipaul's family were orthodox Hindus of east Indian origin, and one of his grandparents had migrated to Trinidad as an indentured labourer at the turn of the century. In 1938, Naipaul's parents and their five children, Vidia and four sisters (there would eventually be another boy—Shiva, who became a novelist and died, at a young age, in 1985—and a fifth girl) moved to Port of Spain, the capital city. Seepersad Naipaul struggled to make ends meet as a journalist, but he was often forced to seek assistance from his wife's family, which was deeply humiliating for him.

Twelve years after the family's arrival in Port of Spain, young Vidiadhar left Trinidad for Oxford on an island scholarship, and he has never returned to live in Trinidad. For many years now Naipaul's home has been in England, in the Wiltshire countryside. As a seventeen-year-old boy, Naipaul left behind his homeland and his family and set sail upon a voyage of discovery. The first half of his career, up to and including *Among the Believers*, can be viewed as an extension of this extended act of departure. He explored many corners of the globe—Africa, India, the Islamic world, Argentina, the Caribbean, Britain—turning his often caustic gaze upon all that he saw. And then, in 1984, with the publication of *Finding the Center*, the second half of his career began to unfold, as a more reflective Naipaul turned his gaze upon himself, and began now to examine the nature of his own journey.

In the past sixteen years, Naipaul has published only two "novels," *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World*, both of which are autobiographical memoirs masquerading as fiction. Also during this period, his travel narratives have become increasingly disenchanted. *A Turn in the South* reads like a light sprint through a scantily observed place, and betrays all the signs of having been hastily written to fulfill a commission; *India: A Million Mutinies Now* is a somewhat leaden tramp across a country in which Naipaul had earlier seemed genuinely interested; and *Beyond Belief* is more properly seen as yet another acerbic assault upon, as opposed to an investigation of, the Islamic world. These travel narratives read like a series of distractions and diversions, for what has evidently consumed Naipaul during this period has been his interminable obsession with the nature of his own "journey," and the "enigma" of his arrival in England, and the mystery of how exactly he has made his way in the world.

His chosen theme is himself, his singular struggle, and the necessity of his having to create a subject for himself where none (or so he claims) existed. Naipaul's exacting tone is that of a man mired in certainty, a man afraid of ambiguity and incapable of stooping to the kind of doubt that fuels great imaginative writing. As he seeks to convince us of "the great shadow" that hangs over his life, there can be no room for ambivalence. It is unlikely that Naipaul will produce another novel, for fiction requires curiosity and generosity, and it is many years now since Naipaul has had anything to offer in those departments.

THE LETTERS IN *Between Father and Son*, letters written at the very inception of his career, deal with the issues with which we are now thoroughly familiar: himself, his struggle, his lack of a subject. In this sense, they are a logical if anachronistic addition to Naipaul's writing of recent years; and reading them, one begins to detect a large and somewhat unattractive continuity in his development as a writer. But a close reading of these letters allows us also to espy something else: the possibility of a subject, a subject that Naipaul willfully spurned, a subject that, had Naipaul grasped it, would not have necessarily made him into a better writer, but would almost certainly have made him into a more likable one.

From the beginning, these letters express Naipaul's desire to be a writer. What

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appears to mark him out from other seventeen-year-old boys is the fact that he can actually write: "At about 12 midnight we were over New York, acres of lights strung in asterisks mottled with red and green and blue," he writes in a letter on September 15, 1950. Or, even more impressively, the youngster's first impression of snow, on December 11th of the same year:

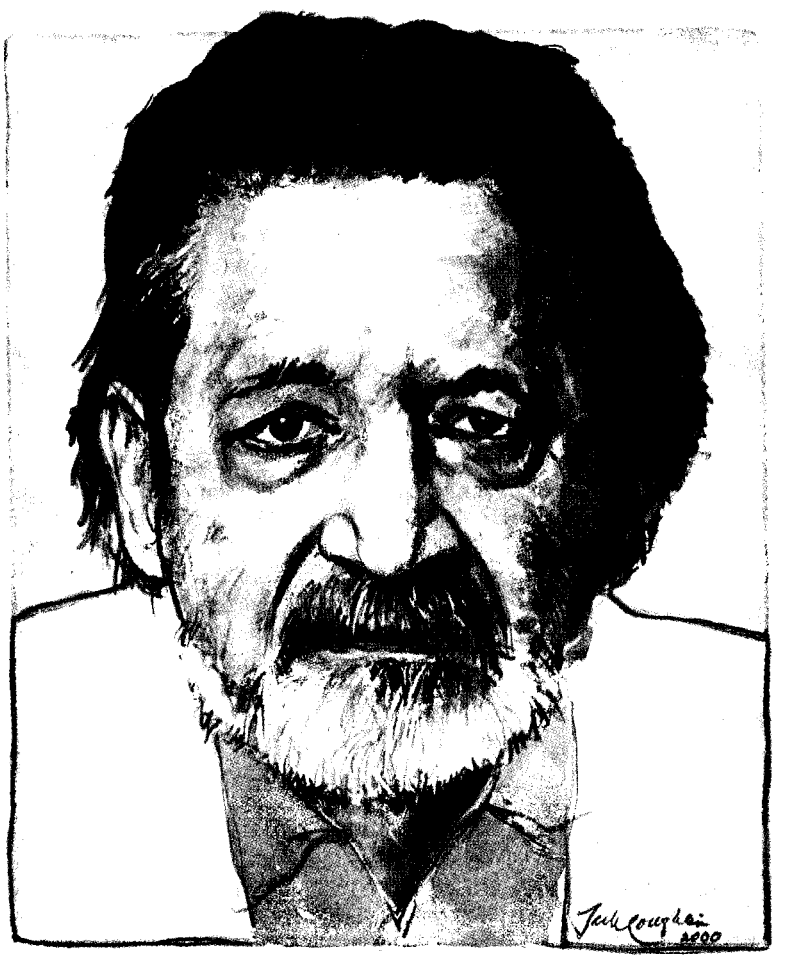
> Last week I had my first snow. It came down in little white fluffs; you felt that a gigantic hand had punched a gigantic cotton wool sack open, letting down flurries of cotton shreds. The camera doesn't lie in this respect. Snow is just as you see it in films and in photographs. It snowed for about two hours. The streets were not covered, but the tops of the naked branches of the trees were white with it—a white that showed more beautiful because the limbs of the trees were in comparison stark black.

The early letters also reveal ample evidence of Naipaul's precocious intelligence, which had earned him a highly competitive government scholarship. In a letter to Kamla, written before he had even left Trinidad, Naipaul displays no qualms about challenging the English canon.

> Jane Austen appears to be essentially a writer for women; if she had lived in our own age she would undoubtedly have been a leading contributor to the women's papers. Her work really bored me. It is mere gossip. It could appeal to a female audience. The diction is fine, of course. But the work, besides being mere gossip, is slick and unprofessional.

By the time Naipaul reaches England, his notion of himself as a literary man standing apart from all is clearly evident. What is equally evident is the determination of Naipaul's father that his eldest boy should succeed as a writer. He addresses his first letter to his young son in England, to "V.S. Naipaul, Esq." Before his son has even reached Oxford, he is proffering encouragement and advice. "I have no doubt whatever," he writes on September 22, 1950, "that you will be a great writer; but do not spoil yourself: beware of undue dissipation of any kind ... You keep your centre. You *are* on the way to being an intellectual."

Seepersad Naipaul was possessed by an ambition to be a writer, an ambition that sputtered but never caught fire. In 1943, this avid reader of Dickens privately published a small and unsuccessful novella about Indian life in Trinidad, called *The Adventures of Gurudeva*. The failure of the book did not deter him from pursuing what he believed to be his rightful course, and he continued to subscribe to periodicals and magazines in England and America. These journals gave him a tantalizing glimpse into the world of letters, but ultimately Seepersad Naipaul felt trapped by the demands of family, and his deep sense of obligation to provide. Eventually the pressure led to a nervous breakdown; and the letters suggest that after the breakdown the father attempted to live his literary life through the increasingly prodigious achievements of his eldest son.



V.S. Naipaul by Jack Coughlin for The New Republic

> I feel so damned cocksure that I *can* produce a novel within six months—if only I had nothing else to do. This is impossible. *But I want to give you just this chance.* When your university studies are over, if you get a good job, all well and good; if you do not, *you have not got to worry one little bit.* You will come home—and do what I am longing to do now; just write; and read and do the things you like to do. This is where I want to be of use to you. I want you to have that chance which I never had; somebody to support me and mine while I write.

While at Oxford, the young Naipaul begins to write in earnest; and his father not only offers unstinting praise, he also begins to intervene and act as his son's editor: "You will see two x's in the body of your article. I think if you would delete the matter between the two x's; and also put some 'ands' in places of full stops, to make your sentences less telegraphic, it will be quite a good article." Throughout the breadth of this correspondence, we are presented with an anxious father who, were we to read his letters in isolation, would come across as an overbearing parent. But the hopes that are lodged in the father are more than matched by the ambitions that are lodged in the son.

Young Naipaul experiences some anxiety which, at the end of his first term at Oxford, he expresses pithily: "I have got to show these people that I can beat them at their own language." And beyond this competitive concern, he is seriously focussed on his literary ambition, having earlier in his first term written to Kamla, in India. On November 22, 1950, he writes:

> I have been engaged on a novel. It is about 8 chapters gone—about 140 pages in any Penguin book; but it is only in a very rough form. I shall not touch it again until the end of next term. I am exhausted. I want new ideas to incubate a bit. I shall have it complete in a year's time. And think what will become of me if it is published! For I am sure of one thing—once it is published, it is bound to sell. It is a humourous novel.

Naipaul's first novels were indeed

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humorous and, soon after leaving Oxford, he found himself in print. But this did not bring him satisfaction, exactly: the deeply ingrained sense of expectation that was a part of his paternal heritage, compounded by his own ambition and sense of entitlement, resulted in the young writer developing a hard—and decidedly unhumorous—attitude towards everything about him. During his first year at university, he writes to the family ("Dear Everybody") about Oxford: "There are asses in droves here ... Nearly everyone comes to Oxford on a state grant. The standard of the place naturally goes down. If you want to find superficial young men, and even more superficial young women, Oxford is the place."

NAIPAUL'S JUDGMENTAL nature does not spare those West Indian writers publishing and gaining a reputation in England, whom he already identifies as "rivals." He continually praises his father's writing, and he easily finds the yardstick by which he can measure his father's talent: "You ought to know that I am perhaps more keen on your work than anyone else is. And, furthermore, as I have often told you, you have the necessary talent. [Edgar] Mittelholzer has no talent, neither has [Samuel] Selvon, who has just written what he calls a novel, but what I call a travelogue."

When faced with displays of emotion, Naipaul responds as though he considers such behaviour to be despicable. In 1950, after quoting at length, to his sister, from "the most beautiful letter I have ever had from a woman," a young woman who is evidently in great pain as she explains that she cannot be involved with him because she is "in love with another," Naipaul slaps himself on the back.

> Good! Not bad, eh? Imagine—your own brother, just turned 18 but lying to every girl that he is 22, drawing that letter from a girl after whom nearly everybody in the English class is rushing! ... Goodbye now, my dearest Kamla, and keep well and don't write letters like the one above, because, you see, I *lied* to that girl.

At so many points in these letters, one detects a fine intelligence betraying itself as it collapses into smugness. While still a teenager, he writes to Kamla about a cousin back in Trinidad: "Just in case you haven't, you must hear now that Deo is chasing penniless men, Phoolo niggers, and Tara douglas." ("Dougla" is a pejorative Trinidadian term for somebody who is half-Indian, half-African.) Already comfortable with his prejudices, sure of his judgment, and determined to write, there is something alarming about young Naipaul's lack of self-knowledge. Again he writes to Kamla: "A friend told me the other day that people don't like me because I made them feel that I knew they were fools. What do you think of me? And don't tell me of your cousins. They are all asses, as you well know." One begins to wonder where, in all this, is the compassion that is necessary if one is going to write with real understanding.

OF ALL NAIPAUL'S books, it is the thinly disguised autobiographical novel *A House for Mr Biswas*, which appeared in 1961, that suggests that Naipaul may have a heart. It is his most personal novel, and it was created out of material that Naipaul saw and experienced as a child. The novel tells the story of Mohun Biswas, a man who marries young, becomes somewhat dependent upon his in-laws, tries to make a living as a journalist, buys a semi-derelict dream house, and dies young and unfulfilled at forty-six. A prose epic on a nineteenth-century scale, its comic warmth eventually gives way to tragedy as Anand, Biswas's intelligent son, is left by himself to succeed the father and take on the world.

Mohun Biswas is a frustrating and somewhat inert man who is forever in danger of sinking below his own dreams. Clearly Naipaul saw his own father in this way. At the end of his first year at Oxford, he drove home the point in a letter to his father, its block capitals the hectoring measure of the degree to which his admiration of his father was turning into desperation about his father:

> YOU HAVE ENOUGH MATERIAL FOR A HUNDRED STORIES. FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE START WRITING THEM. YOU CAN WRITE AND YOU KNOW IT. STOP MAKING EXCUSES. ONCE YOU START WRITING YOU WILL FIND IDEAS FLOODING UPON YOU ... I HATE LECTURING YOU THIS WAY BUT I WANT TO HEAR THAT YOU ARE WRITING. I WANT TO HEAR THAT YOU ARE WRITING VERY VERY MUCH. YOU HAVE BEEN IDLE SUFFICIENTLY LONG ... You are the best writer in the West Indies, but one can only judge writers by their work.

There certainly is passion here; and there is passion in *A House for Mr Biswas* and in the three books that preceded it, *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), and *Miguel Street* (1959). In the post-*Biswas* years, however, it is difficult to find much passion, or compassion, in Naipaul's work. The guiding principle of Naipaul's work became his so-called analysis of so-called inferior societies and inferior peoples; and then, in more recent years, the work has transformed itself once again and become an extended meditation upon himself.

Having written about his father in *A House for Mr Biswas*, Naipaul had fulfilled an obligation. His primary task in life, to make himself into a writer, had already been accomplished. *A House for Mr Biswas* was his fourth book, after all, and it enhanced an already impressive reputation. But by placing his father at the center of a novel that depicted his father's difficulties in the world of colonial Trinidad, Naipaul was both dignifying and paying tribute to the life of the man who had steered him towards the writing life. And having completed this book, and fulfilled this duty, Naipaul's hostility towards Trinidad began to gather steam.

HE BEGAN NOW to publicly claim that he had yet to find a real subject. When Derek Walcott asked him, in an interview for the Trinidad *Guardian* in 1965, if he felt "displaced" on returning home for a short visit, the aloof and dismissive Naipaul was clear: "Oh yes. I find this place frightening. I think this is a very sinister place ... Also, manners are not very good." Six years later, in 1971, Naipaul told *The Listener* in London that he no longer even imagined the West Indies to be a real place.

> I saw myself as leaving the rather empty, barren place where I was born and rejoining the old world. It was as simple as that. Joining the real world again. I used to spend so much time trying to analyze why the world I was born in was not real. I used to think it was perhaps the light .... The society was such a simple one that I don't think there would have been room for me.

Why this antipathy to Trinidad and the Caribbean? What was it about "simple" Trinidad that rendered it incapable of further stimulating Naipaul's literary imagination? After all, Trinidad had provided him with the subject-matter for his first four books. In *Reading and Writing: A Personal Account*, a slim volume comprised of two short essays that appeared in 1999, Naipaul returns to his well-worn theme of how he began his uniquely difficult task, against all the odds, of heroically making himself into a writer; and here he suggests what it was about Trinidad that he found deficient.

> Unlike the metropolitan writer I had no knowledge of a past. The past of our community ended, for most of us, with our grandfathers; beyond that we could not see. And the plantation colony, as the

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> humourous guidebooks said, was a place where almost nothing had happened ... As a child trying to read, I had felt that two worlds separated me from the books that were offered to me at school and in the libraries: the childhood world of our remembered India, and the more colonial world of our city ... What I didn't know, even after I had written my early books of fiction, concerned only with story and people and getting to the end and mounting the jokes well, was that these two spheres of darkness had become my subject.

According to Naipaul, then, colonial Indian Trinidad has to be understood as the heart of darkness: a Third World within a Third World, a dark place within a dark place.

As a young man, Naipaul had already begun to cultivate his hostility towards his homeland. On January 27, 1951, he wrote to his father from Oxford about his contempt for Trinidad and Trinidadians: "Do you know? I got some Trinidad papers, read them, and found them hilariously absurd. I never realized before the *Guardian* was so badly written, that our Trinidad worthies were so absurd, that Trinidad is the most amusing island that ever dotted a sea." One can only imagine how Seepersad Naipaul, who worked for the Trinidad *Guardian*, and wrote stories about life in Trinidad, and wished to make a reputation for himself as a West Indian writer, must have felt upon reading these words, and others like them.

In the 1960s Naipaul began to travel, first to the Caribbean region for *The Middle Passage* (1962), and then to India for *An Area of Darkness* (1964). Alongside his constructed sense of himself as a writer, he was now beginning to construct his subject-matter, his "two spheres of darkness." He "investigated" this darkness, promoting his own vision as the only beacon of light that could penetrate these "half-made societies." And he seemed incapable of confining his often clichéd and ill-informed commentary to the pages of his books; he revelled also in providing sharp copy for Western journalists, all the while insisting on how stupid non-white, non-Western people really are. In 1979, when Elizabeth Hardwick asked him, in the pages of *The New York Review of Books*, what the dot on the forehead of Indian women means, he replied: "the dot means: my head is empty." And when she asked about the future of Africa, he offered an even more idiotic response: "Africa has no future."

These days Naipaul appears to have grown weary of "the two spheres of darkness," and prefers to rehearse and to rerehearse his "civilizing" journey out of Trinidad and into the "real" world. The examination of his "solitary" journey is his principal subject, with himself as the central character. From *Finding the Center* to *Reading and Writing: A Personal Account*, the story remains the same: in a journey unique to myself, I left my worthless home, with its small people, and I sailed against the tides of chance and history looking for a better place—for the center—where I suffered greatly and made myself into a great writer.

The truth, of course, is that aside from the specific personal details, there is nothing at all unique about Naipaul's journey. Contemporary literature, in all regions of the world, is populated with writers who, for various reasons, felt compelled to leave home and to remake themselves as writers in another place. Joseph Skvorecky, Wole Soyinka, Milan Kundera, Ngugi Wa'Thiongo, Charles Simic, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, the list is almost endless. But these writers have not promoted the myth of their painful, solitary journey, understandable only against the awful backdrop of their barbarous "homeland" and its foolish people, among whom their own individual intelligence stood out as superior. They understood that their journey makes sense only in the context of a people and a place about which they choose to write truthfully, and with sympathy. So why is it that Naipaul continues to attempt to inscribe his self-aggrandizing, and frankly embarrassing narrative into the literary conscience of the West?

In 1953, Naipaul's father died suddenly of an unspecified nervous disorder and cardiac arrest. We might well assume that he died of a broken heart. The younger Naipaul was just entering his final year at Oxford. Two years earlier he had written to his sister in India:

> As I grow older, I find myself doing things that remind me of Pa, more and more. The way I smoke; the way I sit; the way I stroke my unshaved chin; the way in which I sometimes sit bolt upright; the way in which I spend money romantically and foolishly.

The twenty-one-year-old Naipaul was understandably shaken by his father's death. The short telegram that he sent to his family on October 10, 1953 is racked with the pain of loss, and replete with the anxieties of new responsibilities.

> = NAIPAUL 26 NEPAUL STREET
> PORT OF SPAIN TRINIDAD
> = HE WAS THE BEST MAN I KNEW
> STOP EVERYTHING I OWE TO HIM
> BE BRAVE MY LOVES TRUST ME =
> VIDO

This is one of the few moments in this revealing volume of letters when young Vido lowers his guard. A year earlier, during the winter of 1952, young Vido had lowered his guard even further. He wrote to his Pa from University College, Oxford:

> I feel nostalgic for home. Do you know what I long for? I long for the nights that fall blackly, suddenly, without warning. I long for a violent shower of rain at night. I long to hear the tinny tattoo of heavy raindrops on a roof, or the drops of rain on the broad leaves of that wonderful plant, the wild tannia. But in short I long for home, or perhaps, the homely atmosphere. And I miss my bicycle rides, and the sea, and the pit at Rialto, and the sort of cigarettes I used to smoke, to everyone's scandal.

Such letters help us to see that, however much Naipaul may wish to protest that he had to find his subject-matter, and to write about his "two spheres of darkness," and to reach the safety of the "real" world (by which we are to understand London), the truth is that he already had his subject-matter. He merely elected to look away from it.

Naipaul's subject-matter was rooted in the same material that has served countless artists, including Aimé Césaire, Edouard Glissant, Alejo Carpentier, and Derek Walcott. There is nothing contemptible about this subject-matter. It is called Caribbean life—the people, the music, the heat, the flora, the fauna, the sunrise, the sunset, the history. But Naipaul did not trust this material, for it appeared to have failed his father. He wished so desperately to succeed that he decided to go beyond what was in front of his face, and beneath his feet, and underneath his nails; beyond what was, in fact, in his soul.

Naipaul has justified his decision to turn away from the Caribbean by arguing that the Caribbean was not a fit and proper place to support his superior imagination. He attempts to account for the "accident" of his early—and probably his most enduring—works by describing them as "concerned only with story and people and getting to the end and mounting the jokes well." As far back as 1971, he was disparaging this work. He told Ian Hamilton, in the *Times Literary Supplement*: "At the back of my mind the thing that embarrasses me slightly about my very early work is that because of my assumptions about the nature of the world I really thought I was writing about a world that was fairly whole." And ten

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years later, in *Newsweek*, Naipaul tried again to disown the early work that looked upon Trinidad with some affection. We are to understand that he reached the civilized world by having written early work that was not of much consequence.

> Of course, when you're starting, you really have got to try to establish a world and it's much easier if you can even pretend that the tribal culture *is* a world, that the life of the street puts you in touch with the wider world. The early comedies made this pretense, I think, and they include *Biswas*, a book I think I remember, though I haven't read the book since I wrote it, you know.

"A book I think I remember"! But in 1983, in his foreword to the paperback edition of *A House for Mr Biswas*, Naipaul states that one evening in 1981, in Cyprus, he was surprised to hear an installment of the novel on the BBC World Service: "I listened. And in no time, though the installment was comic, though the book had inevitably been much abridged, and the linking words were not always mine, I was in tears, swamped by the emotions I had tried to shield myself from for twenty years." But inevitably Naipaul's fear of weakness, and his contempt for feeling, kicks in, and he soon scampers back to his official narrative. Again we are to understand that *Biswas*, and the other early books about "tribal culture," were written at a time before he had found his true subject-matter. He once remarked that "the life I wrote about in *Biswas* couldn't be the true nature of *my* life because I hadn't grown up in it feeling that it was mine." He might have remarked, more accurately: I had grown up fearful that this life, and this life alone, was mine, and as soon as I felt confident enough to ditch it, I did.

DESPITE THE BRICKBATS of many Third World critics and writers, Naipaul has enjoyed a much-acclaimed career. And despite his success and his reputation, Naipaul continues to peddle his story with an almost pathological vigor. This suggests that something is amiss. And clearly it is. Naipaul's career makes sense only if one accepts the fact that he has known and subsequently escaped the "darkness." Here is a man who can visit the Ivory Coast, or Iran, or Pakistan, or his native Trinidad, and make the most outlandish, racist, unscholarly, and inaccurate statements, in books and in interviews, and still be taken seriously. Incredibly enough, in many quarters he is regarded as an authority. The luminosity of his prose no doubt lends him credibility in the opinion of some readers; but Naipaul's supreme qualification is that he has himself been a part of the unreal Conradian darkness that he is shedding light upon. He, too, has been moored in a place of no history, but by some supreme individual effort he has dragged himself to civilized higher ground—to a place of good manners. It causes him great anxiety and stress to continue to gaze upon such bestial places, but he will do so for our sake. It is his duty, his vocation. He has known no other. And we must trust him, because he knows.

Well, he certainly does know. He knows that unless he can persuade editors and critics in the West to subscribe to the myth of his unique journey, he will be just an extremely gifted travel writer with a bee in his bonnet about filth, order, and "primitives." The narrative of escape from a near-encounter with tribal doom elevates Naipaul to a position of authority, and over the years countless interviewers have listened patiently to his prejudice and simply scratched away in their notepads. What was Elizabeth Hardwick's response to Naipaul's stupid comment about the dot on the forehead of Indian women? It was: "In Naipaul's fiction the narrator is often a lonely, displaced Indian, far from home. Nothing is quite real to him, and yet he must summon a sort of hope, take on enterprises if he can find them." It would have been bad form, presumably, to wonder about his bigotry.

I MISS VIDO, the one who misses his bicycle rides, and the sea, and the pit at the Rialto, and who longs for nights that fall blackly, and the tinny tattoo of heavy raindrops on a roof, and the drops of rain on the broad leaves of the wild tannia. Unfortunately, he makes only the briefest of appearances in the letters. This Vido trusted Trinidad to stir his heart, but eventually the Naipaul in Vido decided that Trinidad was best left to the inferior "West Indian" writers. And so Naipaul stifled Vido, and invented somebody else. In 1983, in an interview with Bernard Levin, it is clear that Naipaul also invented an entirely different Trinidad from that which Vido remembers. Levin says that "You were born in Trinidad," and Naipaul comments:

> I was born there, yes. I thought it was a great mistake . . . I didn't like the climate. I didn't like the quality of the light. I didn't like the heat; I didn't like the asthma that [it] gave me. I didn't like a lot of the racial tensions around me . . . I didn't like the music; I didn't like the loudness. I just felt I was in the wrong place . . . . I didn't like my family particularly either. To grow up in a large, extended family was to acquire a lasting distaste for family life. It was to give me the desire never to have any children of my own . . . I developed a fantasy, I suppose, of civilization as something existing away from this area of barbarity. The barbarity was double: the barbarity of my family and the barbarity outside.

Would his father have approved of such sentiments? I doubt it. In the second essay in *Reading and Writing*, Naipaul remembers his father.

> . . . the desire to be a writer came to my father in the late 1920's. He did become a writer, though not in the way he wanted. He did good work; his stories gave our community a past that would otherwise have been lost. But there was a mismatch between the ambition, coming from outside, from another culture, and our community, which had no living literary tradition; and my father's hard-won stories have found very few readers among the people they were about . . . He passed on the writing ambition to me; and *I*, growing up in another age, have managed to see that ambition through almost to the end.

But the son had no desire to try to give his community a past. In fact, the son could not run quickly enough to "another culture," to a "living literary tradition."

The father did what all writers do when faced with an apparent absence, or distortion of their history: he attempted to write that history. This is the story of Skvorecky, Soyinka, Kundera, Wa'Thiongo, and the others; and it is also the story of Seepersad Naipaul. But it is not the story of V.S. Naipaul. Having fled to "the outside," to England, where he "discovered" his "two spheres of darkness," Naipaul then proceeded to people these spheres with ungenerous, unsympathetic portraits of "primitive" people, all the while sponsoring the myth of himself as an exhausted truth-teller whose dispatches can only be fully understood in the context of his own remarkable journey. Of course, a writer does not have a duty to stay at home and to write about home. A writer is not only a son, and literature is not primarily an expression of loyalty. But surely a writer cannot conclude from his own unhappiness at home that home is in some essential way unworthy. Surely it is not necessary, or even interesting, for a writer to distort or to destroy whatever it is that he wishes to—and is free to—leave.

The real hero of these letters, in the end, is Seepersad Naipaul. By turns naïve, desperate, and irresponsible, he believed both in literature *and* in people. He was determined *and* generous. He was ambitious *and* sympathetic. Unlike

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his son, he did not confuse the lack of a tradition with the lack of a subject-matter. It was true that Trinidad had a short and underdeveloped literary tradition, but the tradition was there to be built, as is the case in many post-colonial societies. And whatever else it may have lacked, Trinidad certainly had subject-matter. Unless, of course, one really does believe that the island, as Naipaul told *The New York Times* in 1980, is populated by "monkeys" who "live purely physical lives which I find contemptible." Seepersad Naipaul once had occasion to chastise young Vido, who had, incredibly enough, suggested to his father that a man is only writing well when people start to hate him. The father knew better.

> And as to a writer being hated or liked—I think it's the other way to what you think: a man is doing his work well when people begin liking him. I have never forgotten what Gault MacGowan [the editor of the Trinidad *Guardian*] told me years ago; 'Write sympathetically'; and this, I suppose, in no way prevents us from writing truthfully, even brightly.

If only the son had listened. ■

CORRESPONDENCE

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things that Stiglitz rightly demands. However, I would guess that those in charge of the IMF—directors, executives, political overseers—know this pretty well. They know, as well, that there is no way that a small outside committee such as the IMF can achieve such goals, no matter how much it presses the foreign governments with which it works.

Thus, the IMF has a choice: Do nothing, or do something that will possibly do a little good and maybe even avert disaster. Most of us prefer doing something.

IMMANUEL LICHTENSTEIN
Princeton, New Jersey

Dead wrong

TO THE EDITORS:

While Benjamin Soskis's description of the future of the death penalty in America is almost certainly accurate ("Alive and Kicking," April 17 & 24), I'd have to take issue with the notion that the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC), probably better described as an interest group than an "institution," has not taken a position on the death penalty. Every statistic on the group's website (*www.essential.org/dpic*) is skewed toward the abolitionist perspective.

A brief example will illuminate this. DPIC's information on deterrence compares the average murder rate of death-penalty states (6.6 per 100,000 people) with that of non-death-penalty states (3.5 per 100,000). Aside from the fact that the non-death-penalty states are predominantly small states (whose low murder rates are given the same weight as those of much larger, death-penalty states), these statistics do not account for Washington, D.C., a non-death-penalty jurisdiction with an extremely high murder rate. Including Washington eliminates any murder-rate gap between death-penalty and non-death-penalty jurisdictions. DPIC simply eliminated the inconvenient murder statistics from D.C. because they didn't conform with the group's transparent agenda.

MARC WONTOREK
New York, New York

BENJAMIN SOSKIS REPLIES:

Marc Wontorek is right to point out that the Death Penalty Information Center does indeed have a clear, if unstated, agenda and that the majority of the statistics the group publicizes play to the abolitionist cause. But it is also the case, as I noted in my article, that DPIC refuses to take a public stand on the death penalty and insists that it is not an advocacy group. And this is precisely my point: Publicly, at least, activists have chosen to eschew the abolitionist position and the absolutist stigma it carries in favor of an emphasis on the reform of the criminal-justice system. And so the fact that some individuals can still sniff out abolitionism buried beneath DPIC's statistics is not at all surprising.

Coe-dependent

TO THE EDITORS:

I was amused by the ingenious chain of reasoning Gregg Easterbrook forged to explain the problems of Buffalo, New York ("Due North," April 17 & 24). Linking Buffalo's inability to change its fortunes to the failure of the Buffalo Bills to bring back a Super Bowl trophy, Easterbrook argues that Coach Marv Levy was fatally handicapped by his intelligence, education, and character. Attributing Levy's intellect and gentle personality to the fact that he holds a master's in history from Harvard University, Easterbrook concludes, "Buffalo should blame Harvard for its ongoing civic despair."

As both a friend and a fan of Levy's, I heartily affirm Easterbrook's assessment of him as "the best-educated man ever to coach a pro football team." My only real disagreement with Easterbrook is over his conclusion that Harvard is to blame. The fault lies not with the Crimson but with the Crimson and the Gold—Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Coe, a small, selective, private liberal arts institution, is Levy's alma mater. Nurtured by a fine faculty, Levy prospered at Coe. A true student-athlete, he excelled in football and track, was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and won admission to Harvard Law School. He was not destined to practice law, however, and quickly concluded that he wanted to spend his life as a coach and teacher. Recalling that "Coe helped me learn how to learn," Levy is currently expressing his appreciation by serving as the national chairman of Coe's $50 million campaign.

Buffalo should blame Coe, not Harvard!

JOHN E. BROWN
Bend, Oregon

Loco motion

TO THE EDITORS:

Jim DeFede jumps on the "bash Gore" bandwagon in his description of the Elián González fiasco ("Loco," April 17 & 24). But has it occurred to any of those who want to send the boy back that perhaps the vice president believes what he says—essentially, that the conflict should be resolved in a courtroom? After all, it has been an acceptable liberal position, until now, to criticize the authoritarian powers of the Immigration and Naturalization Service as unjust precisely because they rob people of due process. I fail to see why Elián's father should not be required to demonstrate his fitness and true desires in a courtroom (in the absence of any Cuban agents) before being permitted to take his son back to a prison society. Oh, yes, I almost forgot—the law dictates otherwise! So then let us change the law.

EVAN KAISER
Seekonk, Massachusetts

Whippersnappers

TO THE EDITORS:

You whippersnappers continue to misunderstand the Social Security program (Notebook, April 17 & 24). Social Security is *social* insurance. Hence its benefits calculations are not as rigidly actuarial as those of a private pension program. Beneficiaries do not get back what they paid in; they get back much more. Those at work today pay the benefits of the previous generation of taxpayers. If it is socially beneficial that mothers stay home until their kids start school, then a Social Security benefits credit for them makes as much sense as the Social Security benefits credit given to World War II veterans for the time they spent out of the labor market.

THEODOR SCHUCHAT
Bellevue, Washington

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Wanted

NO, I WILL not yield to the gentleman from South Carolina. You're 173 years old, and you're drooling on your tie. No, I think I won't address my remarks to the chair. I think I'll address them to the self-righteous jerk from Utah. Nice job on your presidential campaign—you almost beat the crazy black guy! No, the classical scholar from West Virginia can shove his point of personal privilege. And hey, my good friend from Colorado, what's with the bolo tie?

SORRY ABOUT THAT. I GET THESE fantasies about New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani coming to the Senate. Now it looks as if it's not going to happen, because he's got cancer, and he's cheating on his wife with an "Upper East Side divorcée," and he doesn't seem to care much about Binghamton or Baldwin or Buffalo, and he probably didn't even want to run in the first place. But it's a real tragedy. Giuliani is vicious and vindictive and quite possibly off his rocker. He is also exactly what Washington needs.

TAKE THE MAYOR'S CRUSADE TO restore order—discipline, really—to the streets of Gotham. The guy thinks he's Batman! He started off with the evil drug dealers and gang members. He moved on to the turnstile jumpers and the aggressive squeegee guys, some of whom turned out to be evil, too. Soon he was cracking down on regulation-bending hot-dog vendors and street artists and cab drivers and homeless people, most of whom are not evil at all. Giuliani even went after jaywalkers, a group of scofflaws who in New York are generally known as "New Yorkers." Come on: Everyone there knows that a flashing DON'T WALK means walk, and a steady DON'T WALK means walk faster.

I AM NOT DEFENDING GIULIANI'S obsessive-compulsive behavior. Not at all. I'm merely pointing out an amazing fact about him: It's absolutely impossible to call him a panderer, not when he's targeting 100 percent of the ambulatory population for harassment. The guy just doesn't seem to care what anyone thinks of him. He pushed out the most popular police commissioner in the country because he thought he was disloyal. (The new commissioner is so loyal he even got prostate cancer when Rudy did.) He ran a sting against rule-breaking bicycle deliverymen *during the Super Bowl.* (The fans who didn't get their pizzas were not happy.) Last month, he blew off four upstate campaign events organized in his honor—a women's lunch, two forums, and a $1,000-a-plate fund-raiser—so he could go to Opening Day. "What can I tell you? This is me," Giuliani explained. "I'm a Yankee fan. I love the Yankees." Republicans, understandably, freaked out. The mayor's response? "Oh, everybody complains about everything."

NEEDLESS TO SAY, GIULIANI'S OPPONent, a Washington transplant, seized the Yankee Stadium snub to score the obvious political points. "Last week I was in Binghamton and Greene and Rochester and Corning and Albany, and I'm back in Albany today," she said. Well, bully for her. But here's the real contrast: As everyone knows, she's a Cubs fan pretending to be a Yankee fan because it's politically expedient. Let the record reflect that Giuliani was a Yankee fan the day it was politically ridiculous.

I'M TALKING ABOUT HONESTY—NOT just political honesty but also emotional honesty. And I'm talking as someone who moved last year from New York City to Washington, D.C. New York is a cruel but emotionally honest place where people actually say the awful things on their minds—the capital of big-city brutality. Washington, especially official Washington, is a polite but emotionally stilted place where everything gets poll-tested and focus-grouped before it can be uttered in public—a cauldron of small-town hypocrisy. To be fair, I'm biased; I grew up on Long Island, the land of Howard Stern and Joey Buttafuoco, a place where silence is not exactly golden and discretion is rarely considered the better frigging part of anything. But don't you think it would be refreshing to have a knee-jerk torpedo damner like Giuliani here, launching personal attacks on his enemies and calling reporters stupid jerks when he doesn't like their questions? Sometimes you'll see Hillary Clinton wishing she could call a reporter a stupid jerk, but she'll do a controlled burn instead. Not Rudy. When it comes to controlled burns, Giuliani is like the National Park Service.

THERE'S AN ESPECIALLY DIRE NEED for an unscripted pol like Giuliani in the Senate, which, thanks to its annoying theatricality, bogus collegiality, and unceasing yapping, may be the most dishonest, on-message location in Washington. I mean, has there ever been a more nauseating spectacle than The Club pretending to welcome back one of its most independent-minded (and therefore most despised) members, John McCain? I covered Congress for a few months last year, and the astounding thing I noticed about most of the senators I met was that they actually utter those silly slogans about "the American people" in private, too. The most notable exception was Bob Kerrey, who is quitting because he wants to move to New York.

I STILL SPEND A LOT OF TIME IN Manhattan, because my girlfriend happens to live across the street from Gracie Mansion. (She's an "Upper East Side divorcée," too.) These days, of course, it's hard to walk past the mansion without thinking about the bizarre soap opera going on in there. It's too bad, really; Donna seems so perfect for Rudy, what with her in-your-face *Vagina Monologues* thing, her fabulously vengeful press conference, her inability to resist pointing out that "Rudy and I reestablished some of our personal intimacy through the fall." But, I have to say, even Giuliani's infidelities are emotionally honest: he never pretended to have a wonderful marriage in the first place, and now he's consciously conducting what may be the first truly public affair in the history of public affairs. He's committing adultery—you got a problem with that?

WELL, OF COURSE, YOU MIGHT. BUT, remember, Giuliani isn't the first married politician with a "very good friend." He's just the first to march with her in the St. Patrick's Day parade and take her to the Inner Circle dinner. You wouldn't see a philandering Washington pol take his mistress to the Gridiron. Here, everybody has to pretend their lives are perfect. I'm thinking of another Washington resident, a guy who happens to be the husband of Giuliani's opponent. He was saying in a recent radio interview, despite some fairly strong documentation to the contrary, that the last seven years have actually improved his marriage. "We've probably had more time together here than at any point in our marriage," he said. "And I've enjoyed that immensely. It's been wonderful for us." I wonder what the next gentlelady from New York thought about that.

MICHAEL GRUNWALD

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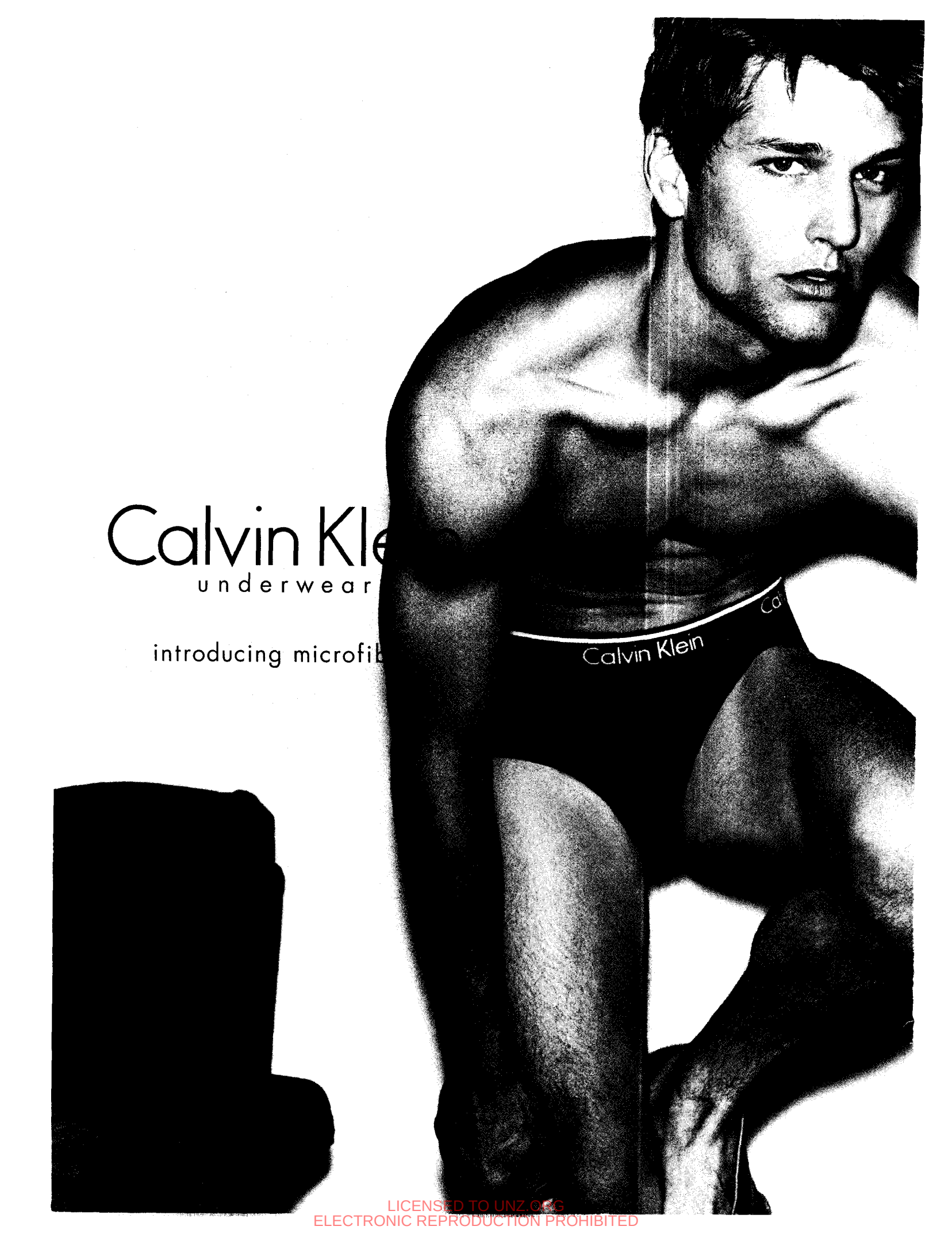

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